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The proud house

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The Proud House

The Proud House

By

ANNETTE ESTY

OF THE



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THE
PROUD HOUSE
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To
A . P . S .



HADLEY MEADOWS*

*By Hadley elms the wide fields lie;
Here under a New England sky
Ringed by the blue New England hills
Old Europe ploughs and sows and tills.*

*Yon barefoot daughter of the soil,
Broad-bosomed, bending to the toil,
Just such a stubborn grace is hers
As Millet gave his harvesters!*

*Patient she spends her old-world strength
Plodding along the furrows length,
Then, at a cry, turns, bares her breast
And sets her suckling babe at rest.*

—KATHARINE MORSE

* From *A Gate of Cedar*, by permission of the Macmillan Company.
publishers.

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Part I: Fraud

Chapter One

JOZEFA pushed eagerly out of the hut. The frayed screen door slammed behind her bare heels. She stood on the porch, straining her eyes down the river road through blurring bands of the setting September sun.

Approaching along the sandy ruts that wound between the river willows and the onion fields was a spread of golden dust scuffed up by some one walking.

Adam, her man, it would be, bringing with him his father, old Michael Zalinski, just come from Poland.

Anticipation stirred in Jozefa; not so much from joy of seeing old Michael again after twelve years as at thought of what he would bring. He had written how he would sell the pig, how he would sell the farm, how he would bring with him to America all that they were worth. Old Michael was not coming empty. He was coming his pockets full, heavy with rubles.

All those rubles of old Michael's added to such dollars as remained to them, ah, what could they not accomplish?

Jozefa's big body was wrapped in a flowered purple-

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calico dress. She had the height, the carriage, the muscular arms of a man, the round drooping breasts and wide hips of a woman. A clean white headsquare, tied under her chin, lent a Madonna frame to her face, large and oval, with coarse brown skin, high cheek bones, and flattened nose. There was strength of will in the set of the mouth, docility in the droop of the eyelids. Over the face of the middle-aged peasant lay an expression of serenity, the dignity of accepted discipline, cut through by the flash of small, keen, shrewd eyes.

It was twelve years since the Zalinskis came to Vermont. For twelve years they had lived in this hut, this made-over henhouse on the land of the Pestwickis'; an outhouse, a shed, a mean shelter. They had had a numerous family. They had been forced to live with great meanness. Yet they had put by as much money as possible. They had saved for the cost of a house.

Last May the dollars in the bank in Milesbrough had at last equaled the two thousand three hundred dollars that was the immense cost of a house.

It was then that old Michael had written. He had written complaining of hunger, begging for a ship's ticket, urging Adam to bring his father to him. "Surely, even there in America," old Michael had written in Polish, "one cannot refuse to a father shelter and nourishment for his old age."

Adam had put the letter in his pocket without speaking. For a week he had gone about work in onions. Then he had silently walked the three miles to Miles-

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brough. He had drawn out ninety dollars from the bank. He had sent his father the ship's ticket.

Again old Michael had written. This time in June, urging for money. He had received the ship's ticket, but there was cost, he said, for the journey. It was necessary to purchase the passport, the visé, the permission to enter America.

Adam had sent his father an order for two hundred dollars.

Again old Michael had written, this time in July. He had now written three times. He had received the two hundred, he said, together with the ship's ticket. He was preparing himself to come. He would butcher the pig. It would bring more money dead. He was ending his affairs; but he owed money, a small old debt of forty rubles that he had borrowed before the war from Stanislaw Sadwinski, brother of Jozefa's; a close hard man with a memory ten versts long.

Again Adam sent dollars; this time twenty.

In all, during last June and July, Adam had sent to his father in Poland two hundred and twenty dollars out of the bank besides the ship's ticket. A mortgage is not to be thought of. It is tying your hands to a Jew. Thus Adam and Jozefa had been forced to put off buying the new house in order to bring old Michael to them.

Now old Michael was coming. He must have butchered the pig. Doubtless he had sold the farm well. He was coming weighted down with a greater wealth than Adam had sent dollars. All that wealth of old Michael's

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added to such dollars as remained to them . . . it would far surpass the cost of the house! They would now buy for themselves the new house, they would buy it before cold weather, they would buy it tomorrow.

A picture of the actual house they would buy dazzled Jozefa's mind. It was the only house that lay in the fields to the north, beyond the house of the Pestwickis'. From here where Jozefa stood on the south porch of the hut she was unable to see it. Ah, she had no need to see it with her eyes; that clear vision of memory was solid in her brain!

The house stood empty. It had stood thus as if waiting for them many years. It was for sale by Doubrette Bros., Real Estate and Insurance, Milesbrough, Vt. Two stories it arose, and a mansard roof. It was of wood painted orange with green trimmings. It towered above the house of the Pestwickis'. It was a proud house. There was no other house like it in all Vermont.

It stood not far from the river, facing east, its many windows gleaming in the sun; the last house on the river road that runs by the onion fields north from the town.

Jozefa passed the house each day going to the fields. Adam rented onion lands from old Peter Pestwicki. Sight of the proud house added springs to Jozefa's legs in the morning; gleam from its many windows cooled the sweat from her face like a breeze in the evening.

For twelve years the Zalinskis had worked in onions. They had saved for the cost of a house. And all that time such longing had pumped in Jozefa!

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Now as she stood on the porch she looked over the low river willows, across the sweep of the silent valley, to where mist hid the eastern hills. It had been a mild day, the air sweet with the scent of ripened fruit. Now at the sunset hour smoke from a bonfire of onion husks, smoldering in a corner of a field, trailed away to blend with the soft hovering September haze. The sun, a great red disk, standing out sharply through the bluish blur above the western horizon, hovered for one burning moment, then dropped like a giant golden coin spent for an immensity of splendor.

The afterglow spread lavishly across the sky, thrust long crimson fingers through the slender leaves of the willows, tinged the stretch of onion lands to rich mosaic gold, touched plump onion bags clustered in the corners of the fields and turned them to sacks of gold, lit all the air to live particles of shimmering gold.

Emotion tingled in Jozefa. Joy curled its rosy fingers up through her knees and thighs. She sprang back into the hut. The screen door snatched with its rickety jaws at the sag of her skirt. She had taken off her husband's old clothes, in which all day she had been screening onions, and arrayed herself in a dress of flowered purple that Adam bought for her at the "Dollar Day" sale in Milesbrough last July.

The kitchen was dim to Jozefa's eyes. Steam from cabbages boiling with pork filled her nostrils. Over a wood fire in the rusty range the pot gurgled in celebration of old Michael.

Jozefa burst out again onto the unroofed boards

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that formed the porch to the south. Again she peered at the enlarging dust-ball approaching along the road.

It was now neither day nor night. It was that golden pause, that breathless, still, unearthly glow before the dark. Phosphorescence kindled all the air, dyed the folds of purple calico to vibrant crimson, burnished the brown skin on Jozefa's face to living bronze.

Some shimmer danced into her brain. Longings and nostalgias pushed big in her heart. Old Michael became for her a link with the homeland; with Stanislaw, poor suffering Stanislaw who never wrote.

Jozefa Zalinska possessed an affectionate and deeply religious nature. A mystic, superstitious, she had been little affected inwardly by transplantation to this new land. She had a lasting sentiment for the old country where she had buried two children, where she had left her father and brother behind. For her, family bonds were never broken.

Again Jozefa plunged into the steamy kitchen, again she lunged her massive body out. This time she tripped on the threshold over Tally, the cat, who with nostrils teased by the savor of boiling pork felt herself also pressed by the need of rushing about.

Jozefa caught at the soiled door frame and straightened herself with a jerk. There by the porch was Adam. Already he had come! Small, silent, his shoulders drooping under his black coat, his dark mustache drooping down his small chin, his sallow face stolid under a derby hat, he stood motionless in the fading light. It

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seemed as if all the red from the teeming sky had dropped down into one single blackened clot.

Adam stood by the step. He made no move to enter. He looked down. He didn't look up at Jozefa. For a moment his figure wavered before her eyes. He seemed to be there and yet not to be there; to be real and yet the first-come shadow of the night. He shrugged his shoulders, only a small shrug. The shrug brought solidity to his body, fixed him firm in Jozefa's eyes. Adam had come. He stood there by the step. But he had come alone.

He had started out an hour ago to walk the mile to Harry's Mill to meet his father at Wobblenski's store. He had started out attended by Jamie and Richard, together with the two girls; surrounding them all the barkings and bouncings of Jeddy. Now Adam had come back without the boys, without Michalina and little Katherine, without the collie, strangest of all without old Michael.

All color dropped from the September sky. The damp sooty film of night closed in about them. The river stirred beyond the willows and sent up its chill breath. Jozefa shivered. Her knees grew weak.

Old Michael had not come. Adam confirmed this more by shrug than by words. Adam Zalinski was a silent man, too tired to talk after work in onions was done. He had no energy left for emotion.

It was a short tale Adam had to tell. It drew out beads of sweat on Jozefa's lip. It laid lead in her stomach.

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No, old Michael was not dead. He had not lost the ship's ticket, nor had the sea swallowed him up. Young Tony Kublic had come on the boat that should have brought old Michael from Poland. Indeed, it had even been arranged how old Michael was to travel with him. Yet Tony had come alone. Adam had seen him. He had been standing, talking with young Kublic a half hour ago, down in the village, in the road, in front of Wobblenski's store.

Old Michael, Tony said, had indeed butchered the pig, but he had eaten it himself. He and his friends had finished it in a week. He had made no attempt, as he had promised in his letters, to sell the farm. He had even, Tony believed, sold the ship's ticket purchased for him at such cost by Adam.

Adam finished it off, Tony's tale, in a few guttural grunts. Old Michael had given up coming to America. He had got himself married instead.

Jozefa threw up her hands.

Married! The old rogue! And after they had been at ~~great~~ cost; the ship's ticket together with money for the journey, the debt, the permission to enter America. Married . . . married again . . . old Michael . . . such an old man . . . past the time for marrying . . . ripe only for the tomb . . . and with two wives already in the burying-ground!

Silently Adam, followed by Jozefa, shuffled past the battered screen door onto the gritty floor of the hut. He sat down without speaking, and drew off the boots

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from his stockingless feet. Odor of trodden sweat mingled with fumes from the fierce boiling of cabbage.

Old Michael had not come. Jozefa's mind was numb from the blow. She sat there in the gloom, her big body hunched forward, her powerful hands grasping the sides of the wooden seat of the chair.

Old Michael had not come. Yet he had written in May, whining with hunger, so that Adam had sent him the ticket.

And again in last June old Michael had written. Jozefa had read the letter over and over until each word of it lived in her brain. "I have received the ship's ticket," old Michael had written. "Send now 200 dollars for the cost of the journey. I will sell the farm and take all with me to America.

"All that the wood lot and the house and the farm buildings bring at a sale I will take with me to America.

"With that fortune I will be little burden upon you."

And in July old Michael had written complaining of Jozefa's brother, of Stanislaw Sadwinski of Lovna. "Now I beg of you," old Michael had said in this letter, "not to allow your ears to listen to what that Stanislaw Sadwinski says concerning me. He lives only to slander me. He even claims that I refuse to pay him the little I owe.

"Send then the dollars as soon as possible, that I may pay the little I owe him and silence his mouth."

Again Adam sent dollars, this time twenty.

It had been Jozefa who wrote the letters last summer

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in reply to old Michael. Adam was unable to write even Polish.

"As soon as this reaches you come at once to America. Come as soon as you sell the farm. Come before the weather is cold. Sell the farm for as much as possible. Spend as little as you can for the journey. Adam will place the remainder of the money for you here in America, where none gets lost.

"In America the winter is cold. It is better to have a good house. Bring with you as much money as possible. A good house shelters the bones. It keeps out ice and snow."

Thus they had sent old Michael both money and advice for the journey. And during the summer, with thought of his coming, the price of the pig and the farm in his pocket, hope for the proud house had persistently pushed in Jozefa.

Now old Michael had failed to come. He had got himself married instead. A wretch! A cheat! Doubtless there had been in his head no plan to come to America. He had plotted only to wring money from them falsely. Such a scamp to be the father of honest Adam!

For twelve years to bend and plant onions! Through the heat of twelve summers to crawl on their knees down the rows! Stasia, their oldest girl, now dead (God's will be done!), had worked for them until she was married, without dowry, six years ago to Wobblenski. Even Michalina, their second girl, had sometimes been persuaded to work. And Jamie and Richard and little Katherine, born in this land and named by

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these names of America, how soon they had learned to weed onions after they were born!

To kneel and drop in sets in the rain, to crawl and weed in the sun, to screen and sack in the wind, to save for the cost of a house!

And now old Michael; how he had cheated, how he had duped and deceived! Jozefa's great chest heaved. She swayed, she moaned with incredulity. Adam sat straight, motionless, taciturn. Two locks of damp black hair curved down his temples across the red mark pressed in by the derby hat.

Slowly the kitchen darkened as they sat there. Adam's face became a vacant white disk in the gloom. The kettle of festivity sputtered and reeked on the stove.

A letter?

Yes, there was a letter. Young Tony Kublic had brought it. He had brought it from Lovna as he had agreed to bring old Michael with him. Slowly Adam pulled from his pocket this letter grimed from the pocket of Kublic. He pushed it across the table to Jozefa. Adam was unable to read even Polish.

Jozefa turned the letter over in her hands. It must have been written by some one at the inn in Lovna. Old Michael could not have written it himself, for he had no knowledge whatever of either reading or writing.

Adam snapped on the electric light that hung over the table. He motioned Jozefa to read. Her hands were clumsy. She was scarce able to open the letter. It was written in Polish.

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"Lovna, Poland, August 1926

"To my son, Adam Zalinski," old Michael's letter said.

"I have the honor to announce to you now my new marriage. It was celebrated on Mary's Day, with some pomp, in the church of Our Lady of Czenstochowa, in Zilnik. My wife names herself Maryanna, Dubak's widow.

"With this dowry brought me by your stepmother it will no longer be necessary for me to go to you in America or to sell off the land.

"Broniek Jahowski, my wife's brother, urges me not to go to America. He has come back from South Chicago. He says in America people do not care for the old. His son only shook his hand, he didn't kiss it.

"Is it not better then for my old eyes to die here of starvation than to scatter my dust I know not where?

"Moreover, my wife's health is poor. She is unable to go.

"It is true I butchered the pig. I even bought a sheep's coat in order to go to America to seek out my son, when the young should rather seek out the old to protect them. Thus you perceive, my son, how I denied myself in order to bring myself to you.

"Your father, Michael Zalinski."

When Jozefa finished reading this letter, she rocked her body and groaned.

They had written to old Michael three letters, sending him in all two hundred and twenty dollars out of

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the bank, together with the ship's ticket. A mortgage is an evil not to be borne; it is a noose round the neck with the rope in the hands of a Jew. Thus they had been forced to put off buying the new house in order to bring old Michael to them.

Yet now old Michael had written as if they had done nothing. He had failed to come. He had got himself married instead. Over and over Jozefa turned this strangeness in her head.

Old Michael had married without first inviting them to the wedding. To the minds of Adam and Jozefa the omission of this formality was incredible. This Mary-anna Dubak, from where had he got her? Was she young? How great was the dowry?

Old Michael had killed off the pig, but he had eaten it himself. He had failed to sell the farm as he had promised. Doubtless he had sold the ship's ticket. Yet he had sent back to them in his letter not even the price of the ticket, not even one of the dollars.

"How then can he expect us to kiss his hand?" cried Jozefa in Polish. "He who thus continues to heap shame upon us!"

Resentment swelled in Jozefa. For the first time in her life she longed to hit back, to curse at old Michael. How he had mocked and defrauded! How he had duped and deceived! How he had flung the dung of deceit in their eyes! He had had in his head no plan to come to America. He had plotted only to wring money from them falsely.

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Jozefa, sitting in the stiff wooden chair by the table under the glare of the light, continued to brood in anger over old Michael and what he had done. Fury pumped in hot streams through her body and strangled her throat. "A curse on this day," she thought, "on the devil who usurps it to make it his own!"

Jozefa opened her lips in revenge. She would curse old Michael. She would curse the father of her man, the father of Adam. She would curse, she who had never cursed before. She would hurl fresh curses. . . .

Jozefa never uttered that curse.

A thick odor of burning cabbage rushed through the hut. Jozefa sprang from her chair. The pot of festivity had burned dry on the stove. Cabbage clung brown and scorched to its sides. It was as if some evil witch had flown in through the window and stirred it with a loathsome finger.

Jozefa never uttered that curse. Instead she stood trembling at thought of that impulse toward evil that had boiled in her heart and burned on her tongue. "God's Mother help me," she prayed, "to push the scoundrel forever out of my mind!"

Soon the boys and little Katherine trooped in, noisy and hungry; followed by Michalina, a sparkle in her blue eyes; and by Jeddy, the thick white fur on his breast dusted with loam.

They were full of the thrill of seeing Tony Kublic again. They had lingered behind to see Tony. He was coming up this evening to tell of all he had seen and

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done on the voyage. They did not notice at once the odor of scorched food in the air; how it clung to the walls of the hut.

Ah, that pot! It gave out a stench that was curse to the nose!

Chapter Two

IT WAS a bitter dish for Jozefa, its savor ruined. It seemed as if stench from the burned cabbage would never melt away. It would remain sunk into the walls of the room as a hurt sinks into the heart.

At supper Jamie and Richard, beaming with joy at thought of seeing their hero again, scarcely noticed the taste of the food. They wriggled with delight. Tony was coming this evening. "Bet he's seen a nairplane," ventured Richard in English, looking up with his timid blue eyes to watch the immensity of this thought electrify the others.

"Bet he seen a billion!" bellowed Jamie, with scorn.

"Gee! I wisht I c'u'd ride in one!" breathed Richard, slowly licking his tongue down the back of his spoon.

"You'd get scared pink, you big booby," jeered Jamie.

Jozefa looked anxiously at Michalina. How had the blow of old Michael's not coming fallen upon her? It was for Michalina most of all that Jozefa coveted the proud house.

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"Aw, say, this place is a mess!" Michalina would complain to her mother in English.

But tonight in spite of the burnt supper, in spite of the disappointment of old Michael's not coming, Michalina's face pictured no annoyance. There was a flush on her cheeks, a smile on her small mouth. Jozefa could not take her eyes off her daughter.

Michalina. Ah, she was pretty! Her hair was fine and yellow, her little fingers pink. Tony Kublic, before he went away in last April, had sat with her in the evenings. She had spent today dressing herself up in her silk dress. She knew Tony Kublic was coming.

By the time supper was over Tony was there. Jeddy's barking announced his arrival before his steps could be heard. With an explosion of enthusiasm Jamie and Richard threw themselves from the table and rushed off into the darkness to meet him.

Tony Kublic came into the hut, his young face into the circle of light. The boys clung to him, jumping up and down, their hands clutching at his shoulders. Jeddy fawned and pitched his great fluffy body about, throwing back his head and repeating deafening bark after bark. Little Katherine sat silent like her father, like Adam Zalinski; and Michalina kept her blue eyes down.

It was pleasure in the heart to see Tony Kublic again! He was not tall, not so tall as Jozefa herself when she stood up; but his shoulders were broad, his body muscular, his round face good-humored. His hair was cut to short light bristles, his skin burned to deeper

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brown. When he laughed his gray eyes lost themselves in little squints.

The kitchen became alive with stir and festivity at Tony's coming. He bent to kiss the gnarled hand of Jozefa; a sweet gesture from the old country among the free laughing ways of the new.

"Gee! it's great to be back!" laughed Tony.

"Seen any nairplanes?" asked Richard.

"Shut up, you booby!" Jamie kicked out a bare leg at his brother.

"Didn't see anything to get any kick out of," said Tony. He was tipped back in a stiff chair by the table and lighting a cigarette. He shook out his match and looked across the table meaningly at Michalina.

Hush fell over the little room when in reply to Jozefa's questions Tony began to tell them of Lovna. He spoke now in Polish, for Jozefa listened easier to her native tongue.

Little but Polish was ever heard in Harry's Mill. Adam could speak a few words of English if forced to, but Jozefa never uttered a word of any language but her own.

The children spoke only Polish until they went to school. There they were taught that they were Americans, not Poles. They were forced to learn English, salute the American flag, be proud they were Americans.

Tony Kublic had been away in Poland four months. His mother's parents were still living on the old farm near Lovna. Last March they had written to their daughter, Mary Kublic. They were dying, the old peo-

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ple said, from starvation. "Send Tony to us," they begged. "He is 19. He is the only grandson. He will inherit the farm."

In April Tony had gone. He had found the farm poor and remote, the soil run out and neglected, the old people dried and bony, yet likely to live on for ten years. They had sent for Tony in hope that from America he would come his pockets full, heavy with dollars. Yet now they urged him to continue with them as free helper on the farm; as one who would work all day without pay and yet be willing in the evening to listen to their groans.

Finding he could do nothing to better the condition of his grandparents, Tony had come home. His mother needed him sorely.

Two years ago Jan Kublic, Mary Kublic's man, ran off and left her. She had five children who were hungry. In order to earn money she made and sold liquor. Three times she was taken to the court in Milesbrough and warned by the judge. In this country one is permitted to eat but not to drink.

Mary Kublic was a good woman. She had never drunk herself. She longed only that her little ones might not starve. Yet last August, while Tony was gone, they had put her in jail for two months.

Now Tony had come home to find his mother locked up, his four younger sisters kept from starving by neighbors, himself in debt to Wobblenski for the expense of his journey.

Tony sat by the Zalinskis' table on this his first

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night at home, his round frank face in the glare from the overhead light. He smoked cigarette after cigarette, his eyes looking across at Michalina, as he told in Polish of his long visit to Lovna.

Jamie and Richard churned about in their chairs, screwing their round chins against the top of the table, their mouths open, their eyes fastened on Tony.

Adam listened stolidly, his eyes down, his short legs stretched out, a pipe between his brown teeth. Michalina toyed incessantly with the hem of her short pink skirt. Little Katherine sat silent like her father, like Adam Zalinski. She was a thin, quiet child, her small tight mouth seldom giving out what her sharp black eyes took in.

Jeddy lay flat on his warm side, close by Tony's chair. Only Tally, the cat, over by the cooling stove, licking fine loam from her yellow paws, held herself in body as in spirit disdainfully apart from the group round the table.

As Tony talked of Lovna a far-away look came into the boy's gray eyes. The ring of American banter died from his voice while he spoke to Jozefa in Polish about the sadness of that old land.

But such eagerness as pumped in Jozefa to hear, such tears as pressed in her heart at his words!

And yet impossible for her to realize the meaning of those words! Lovna, the beautiful village of her girlhood, with its tall trees, its winding street, its prosperous farms, its thick forest, its pond like a moist blue eye,

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its church nestling at the crossroads, all swept away by war as by a flood!

As she listened to Tony's account of how he had seen her brother, Stanislaw, of how he had stood near him; of how he had talked with him and held his hand, emotion pressed continually in Jozefa's throat.

Jozefa Zalinska had come to this country with her husband and two little girls in 1914. It was unusual for a Polish peasant to be able to read and write, yet always once a year on his name-day of St. Stanislaw she penned a long unanswered letter of affection to her twin brother at home in Poland; a letter of sorrow and separation, of love and marriage, of the weather and crops, of birth, death, and catastrophe.

Jozefa's father, Jozef Sadwinski, must have been a man of exceptional attainment, for he knew how to both read and write. In Russian Poland, during his lifetime, teaching the Polish language was forbidden. Sadwinski privately instructed his children.

Jozefa's twin brother, Stanislaw, never left the home province. He was able to write letters with his own hand, yet he never showed himself the intellectual equal of his sister. Except when old Michael Zalinski, the father of Adam, sent a message from the old country, Jozefa could not know whether her brother was living. He neither wrote nor sent gifts.

During the war communication between Poland and America was cut off. For some time after the war letters were either never received or took two or three months for the journey. Yet always on his name-day

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Jozefa wrote to her brother in the homeland; poor, shiftless, crushed, emotional Stanislaw. She had for him a faithful affection.

Now Tony had seen and talked with Stanislaw. Ah, it was speech from the dead! Jozefa's big mouth twisted and worked. She kept wiping the palm of her rough hand across it.

It had been old Michael Zalinski who sent the letter informing Jozefa that her father was no longer of this world. He died in 1924, the year of the famine; yet her brother had sent her no mourning letter.

"I have urged, I have begged my brother to write, if only three words," Jozefa lamented in Polish. "I know it is difficult for you to begin any matter, yet inform me if you are alive, I have cried, for my heart is sore with uncertainty."

Now Tony Kublic had seen Stanislaw with his own eyes. He had talked with him as they stood in the mud of the road before the inn door in Lovna. The sun had shown down on Sadwinski's shabby long-skirted cloak, worn even in summer, on his bare head thinly covered with wisps of white hair. He was a man of fifty. To Tony Kublic he had seemed far older than his years.

Tony was now able to repeat to the ears of this little well-fed, well-clothed family group here in America the very words Sadwinski had uttered. But into Tony's eyes alone was burned the picture of poor Stanislaw's tall shriveled body in its ragged wrappings as he had stood by the inn door on that day last August. In Tony's memory alone rose that starved ashy face, lit by the

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fierce, unquenchable, fanatical fire in two dark eyes; eyes that never faced facts when they could fill from emotion instead. Sadwinski's lips spoke of harsh happenings, yet it was clear that to him it was not so much the events themselves as the play of his own emotions about them that seemed of supreme importance.

"He said your father died of a fever," Tony now told Jozefa, "on St. Paul's, two years after the war. They say he cried like a child when he saw the flag of new Poland over the post-office. For there is now a republic in Poland . . . no king . . . but a real American president.

"You ask how it goes on with your brother," continued Tony in Polish, "and I am forced to answer, as bad as possible. His lot there is hard. During the war they were stripped first by the Germans, then by the Russians. They didn't know whether to fly or to remain. Stanislaw hesitated to do either. So he remained.

"Their house was burned down, thatch and walls, burned to the ground. They shelter themselves in the barn. It is roomy enough; every animal gone out, even the rats.

"The sons, Jan and Stefan, were forced into the Russian army. Jan was shot, like Leo Koszinski, in the leg. Stefan lay in hospital. Now they sit at home. They neither work nor marry.

"The health of his wife, Julka, is bad. Prayers fill up her mind. She doesn't complain, though they live there as if they were dogs.

"There is no work in Lovna. Or if work, one earns nothing. The houses are burned, the fields dug away.

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Finally they have raised the taxes. Your brother says he may be forced to put a mortgage on the land.

"The fields were turned into earthworks. It is still difficult to plow. There are few horses left. Satrowski plowed with his cow. Jan Sulewski forced his woman to draw the plow until she fell sick in the field.

"Jan Karniki beat his wife to death. He pushed her body into the filth under the house. He said he didn't know why he did it. He was tired of hearing her groan. It is said he wanted to eat her. They took him away in a cart. They put him in the same cart with the body of his wife. He tore out his hair in handfuls. There were sores on his head.

"Finally the church has fallen in. In Lovna is nothing but gloom. No one has strength to walk the nine versts to Zilnik to the Mass.

"Stan Linko is lucky. He got himself two gray draft horses. He'll get a good crop. Last fall he came and plowed without charge for your brother.

"And now it is whispered about," said Tony, turning to Adam, "how your father wastes your inheritance. Michael Zalinski, they say, has squandered his land. There are hardly two morgs that remain. Yet he sits and boasts by the inn. He says you have bought much land in America. Already you own more than half of America. He says you'll never return; you'll never trouble to work that small old farm in Lovna.

"How they laugh at his lies! What a tongue, they say, for an old shriveled fellow!

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"How he boasted of going to America! How he got himself married instead! The wedding was an orgy, every one drunk, windows smashed. The place was a wreck. And yet this new wife, they say, is a plague upon him and little blessing.

"That Maryanna Dubak. He got her from a Jew's shop in Zilnik. She brought him not more than six hundred zlotys. Most of that he wastes on drinking. Maryanna's five children by Dubak, together with her brother, Jahowski, and his entire family cling on at the farm, although the wedding festivities have now been finished for weeks.

"They eat off of him. There is no decency, only carousal and filth. Jahowski drinks with his new brother-in-law until the old man rolls drunk on the floor. Put foot near the house and you get such a stench as upsets the stomach."

During the whole of Tony's recital, Jozefa had been rocking herself about and moaning continually. Adam had sat with the habitual expression of bewilderment on his face unchanged. Now he got up and went to the door without speaking.

Jozefa followed him. She stood watching Adam as he went out of the hut and turned away in the dark. She knew where he was going. He was going across the fields to the Pestwickis' to drink liquor.

With this trouble that chafed his soul, this cheating of old Michael's, Adam would sleep better drunk.

He was a quiet man, Adam, stolid, hard-working,

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illiterate, yet never brutal toward Jozefa even when he drank. "A log," they used to say of him in Lovna; a log who never lifted hand against Jozefa, never beat her. For this reason it had even been whispered about how Adam neglected his wife.

The children and Jeddy now disappeared into the front room. Jozefa with Tony and Michalina sat on in the kitchen under the glare of the light.

Jozefa's thoughts were on Lovna, on Tony's meeting with her brother, on Stanislaw's words. Tony's thoughts were on Michalina, on the pink curve of her cheek.

Suddenly Jozefa began rolling her body about and wringing her hands. "So much money gone," she wailed, thinking of her father-in-law's wedding, "to feed the bellies of swine!" Money much needed for other purposes that she went on to enumerate; important among them the dowry of Michalina.

Michalina watched Tony get up and put down the stub of his cigarette. Her cheeks were crimson because of her mother's words. Michalina was "mad" because Jozefa had mentioned dowry before Tony. She flounced out of the hut into the crisp air of the night. Tony followed and held her close by the arm.

Jozefa watched them go. "Ah, the strangeness of this Vermont," she thought, "where a boy doesn't even ask what dowry goes with a girl!"

Alone in the kitchen, she began living over again her girlhood in Poland. Her mind refused to take in this sad new picture brought her by Tony. She thought of

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her father, of Jozef Sadwinski. How he looked like a king when he walked through the village! He was a man tall, straight like a pine, with eyes like an eagle's. He sat on a bench under his trees. He was proud. He could read and write. He had fought in the great rebellion. He had been three times to Warsaw.

Jozefa repictured her father's house, the greatest house in the village. It had stood at the head of the street toward the west, on high ground, a cross perched like a stork on its gable.

Jozefa sat with eyes shut. The littered room, the glaring light, were gone. She was sitting under the trees in Lovna; a starry night, and she a maiden. Young Adam Zalinski sat near. Ah, the thrill of his arm round her waist! The summer evening hemmed them in, with innumerable hummings, with smell of freshly plowed earth awaiting the seed.

"I will make a little poem in my head," sighs young Jozefa. "The birds twitter in the trees. But a lovelier bird sings in my heart!" She would often make up such poems in her head. She would whisper them to Adam. She would run away with a blush on her face.

Later Michalina came back into the kitchen, stumbling in on her high heels. Jozefa was roused from her dream. She opened her eyes to the glare of the light.

Michalina was still mad. At first she refused to speak to her mother.

Finally, "I wish to goodness you'd cut out that dowry stuff, ma!" she snapped. She went and sat herself down petulantly on one of the beds in a corner of the kitchen.

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But after the light was put out Jozefa could hear Michalina humming to herself; her young voice fresh and sweet, though a bit rasping and through her nose:

"You love me, honey. I love you!

I love you, hon . . . nee. You bet I do!"

Chapter Three

WHEN old Michael Zalinski finally arrived in America, at the home of his son Adam, it was suddenly and without warning. No one expected him. No one had any thought that he would come.

It was in May, a whole year after he wrote that first letter to Adam begging for a ship's ticket and groaning with hunger.

It was evening and Jozefa was sitting in the kitchen. Adam had gone across the plowed land to the Pest-wickis'. The boys and little Katherine were who knows where? Hanging round Wobblenski's store, perhaps.

Jozefa, left alone, was writing to her brother, her big body hunched across the table, her elbows out. Her brown face bent nearer and nearer the paper. She would speak to Stanislaw once more. Once more she would cry to him by means of a letter. She could not pick out from her heart the hope that he would answer. Surely this time he would heed. Surely this time he would answer.

The single electric light suspended from the ceiling by a fly-specked cord shed its unshaded glare into every

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corner of the cluttered room. Sweat moistened Jozefa's forehead. Many groans attended her task.

It was the first warm evening of spring, the room full of the smell of unaired bedclothes and the recurrent boiling of cabbage.

After supper Michalina had gone out. The instant her hand touched the door-knob, Jeddy had jumped like a released spring from his deep sleep by the stove. He had followed Michalina out into the night.

Jozefa could hear the voices of the young people as they passed near the hut. Michalina had joined Anastasia Gutfinska. Together with Tony Kublic and John Ripkar they were spending the evening strolling up and down.

Jeddy, who walked at their heels, slung a heavy growl occasionally at another dog or threw a sharp bark at the silly shrilling of the frogs.

Jozefa pictured in her mind the progress of the young people. They would smoke cigarettes and chew gum from Wobblenski's store. With arms round each other they would walk up and down the whole length, over a mile, of dirt road that was the one street of Harry's Mill. The road ran between the houses and the river. Electric lamps, spilling out powerful rays through dirty uncurtained windows, lighted part of the way.

Down from the dark onion fields here at the north of the town, past the row of lighted houses near the store, beyond the schoolhouse and the straggling cottages, the young people would finally reach the house

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of Stanley Wobblenski on a dark headland where the river turns at the south of the town.

Then back again up the street, past the cottages, past the row of lighted houses, north of the dark schoolhouse and the store. There was nothing doing in Harry's Mill on a May evening, Michalina would complain, except aimlessly fooling around.

To Jozefa Zalinska the fooling around of young people on a spring evening did not seem aimless.

Jeddy's barking grew more distant, the laughter of the young people fainter. Settling over all other sounds like a thin haze was the perpetual piping of the frogs.

Harry's Mill was that tiny New England hamlet that in the great flood of 1927 was completely swept away. On this night in May the village lay peacefully in the bend of the river as if pressed against the body of a friendly monster. It blinked its house lights sleepily, unconscious of its doom.

Jozefa thought of the river and shuddered; the river beyond the willows, asleep yet always awake, immovable yet always in motion, dark yet shimmering with strange buried light. She was unable to think of its black depths without an uncanny tingling, a shivering from the supernatural that crept up her spine, pressed painfully in her nose, forced tears from her eyes. There on the other side of the road, beyond the willows, under the mist, the river was coiling and stretching in the dark like an enormous snake, swollen, black, ominous, endless.

During the day Jozefa was busy working in the fields. She had no time for fears. But toward night what

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shivers came with the dark! Nothing could induce her to venture as near the river as the thick willows that lined its banks.

Not all vampires, evil spirits, and demons had been left behind in the old country. They had accomplished an easy transition by fastening themselves like leeches in Jozefa's credulous mind.

One morning in the half light before sunrise she had peeped through the frame of the willows. It was just beyond the edge of night; the light thin, new, and uncertain; the air pale and shivery. What Jozefa took for rising whirls of white mist and dancing fairies were, in truth, as she realized afterwards in the night, gray witches closing some occult rite about a misty-blue caldron out of the steam of which rose careening white goats with blue horns. After that Jozefa avoided the river, except at midday, as if it were a grave that yawned before her feet.

In the thick heat of the cabin Jozefa now bent to her task. She wrote slowly with the stub of a pencil on a piece of thin yellow paper brought from school by Jamie for some homework never performed. As she wrote, the pencil pulled from her soul its veil, uncovering clumsy regrets, crude hopes, and clinging affections.

"Tony Kublic informs how it goes on with you at home, how the health of your family is bad.

"How God walks in ways that are dark! Things never went easy for you even as a child.

"Now the weather is fair. Already they work the

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ground. Adam works in onions. He earns good money. Last winter the onions sold well. Now (God grant it!) we will buy for ourselves a new house. We live now in this henhouse on the land of the Pestwickis, a bad shelter.

"Now I report how the health of our family is good. Our oldest girl, Stasia (God's will be done!), is no longer of this world. I sent you her photo with a mourning letter. It is now two years since she died. Now our second girl, Michalina, has lived for 18 years. She walks every day to Milesbrough to get instruction at the High School.

"Now Jamie, 13 years, Richard, 11 years, and Katherine, 9 years, go to the school.

"God has blessed us greatly. My man, Adam, is a good man. Soon we will own a grand house over our heads.

"Our fields slope to the hills. Here we are surrounded by hills as by a wall, but in Lovna by a flat plain. Now we work each day in the fields. We crawl on our knees down the rows. Soon the onions will push up green fingers. The wind will rumple their little green hairs.

"Our neighbors plant onions. The Slambowskis are prosperous. Their farm is across from Wobblenski's.

"Jan Jawuski and Stan Staszkos hire out to Adam. They neither own nor rent land.

"The Pestwickis refuse to plant onions. They only want to make homebrew. Old Peter has five sons and three girls. They have a bad name and no weddings. They say the fields in Vermont are no good, they are

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narrow and stony. They even refuse to go off to Chicopee-Mass, and work in the mill. Yet in America there is work for all.

"There is no church in Harry's Mill. We walk on Sunday to Milesbrough, three miles. I carry with me my shoes. I sit down at the church door and put on my shoes. Michalina runs on into the church. She is ashamed because I put on my shoes."

As Jozefa was laboriously finishing this letter, her attention was called to footsteps outside, the scraping of feet on the path. It would be Adam, she thought, come home early from the Pestwickis'. When he did not enter she went to the door and looked out. It was a moist, warm night. The river mist had risen above the willows; its haze blurred the glitter of the stars. All the world teemed and murmured in gentle, persistent upspringing. The dripping lilacs by the cabin, the drenched willows by the river, refused sleep. Even in the dark they swelled and pushed out their buds.

Across the road from the hut of the Zalinskis' the river lay swung in its willow bed. Under a thick blanket of darkness it had pulled up a sheet of soft mist over its head. There it slept without giving out a murmured hint of its dreams.

A band of golden light shone out from the cabin door and across the earthy fields. By its light Jozefa could see a large rounded object, greater in girth than an ox, struggling and rolling up the path toward the door. It was too bulky for Jeddy, too great to be Adam.

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Fear clutched at Jozefa. The cow! Had some thieving fingers loosed her from the shed?

As the monster, magnified by the mist, rolled and staggered into the band of light, Jozefa made out, above an enormous paunch, what seemed to be a man's face, below a round fur cap, looking anxiously forth.

She had not seen that face for thirteen years, but it was there on a photograph indoors; though now, unlike the photograph, old, anxious, lined, and unshorn . . . the face of old Michael, old Michael Zalinski, the father of Adam, topping that repulsive swelling, that distorted balloon of a body.

Was it some ghoul, some misshapen diabolical creature, some spawn of the river? Superstitious shiverings laid hold of Jozefa. She made a quick sign of the cross. She thought of that night last September when old Michael failed to arrive. She remembered the pot of burnt cabbage stirred by some loathsome finger. She felt again the heat of her anger, tasted again the half-formed curse her lips had parted to hurl.

Jozefa had never uttered that curse, yet it had formed in hate in her heart. Now a dreadful disquietude filled her. Might not this indistinct apparition, this distorted shape of old Michael, be the abortive curse itself come back (as is always the way with a curse) to rend its creator?

Jozefa strained her eyes through the mist. Her body shook as with cold. She wanted to dart back in the hut, and bolt to the door. Instead she stood, her muscles hardened, a scream choked in her throat. She longed to

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throw her apron over her head, plunge out into the fog, run all the way to Milesbrough, into the church, prostrate herself before the shrine of St. Jozef, promise him candles, pledge to him even the cow.

The face that was the face of old Michael pushed nearer. It peered up to where Jozefa stood on the porch. The slant eyes glittered evil. The breath came in hot snorts.

It was old Michael, old Michael indeed! Yet he who had had a thin shriveled body last time she saw him seemed now distended like a cow with calf, swollen beyond belief.

As Jozefa's fear became less, her astonishment became more that old Michael was here . . . here yet so strangely misshapen.

Not till his gruntings had partly subsided, not till he was able to speak to her after the strain of getting his bulk up the steps and cramming it in through the door, did Jozefa really take in the almost incredible fact that old Michael was here.

Nobody expected him. Nobody had sent him a letter. He had not written to Adam begging again for a ticket or urging for money.

Since September Adam had sent him no message. No letter had come from old Michael. And now it was spring and in May. Yet here was old Michael . . . old Michael Zalinski, and what a fright he had given! The rogue! The thief! The cheater! How had he come? With whom had he come? By what fraud had he got himself into this land?

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Where was the wife he had married? Where her family that fed off of old Michael? Had the whole pack come at his heels across the water to fall upon them in this new land?

Old Michael was here, but he had come alone. And when he had staggered into the kitchen he performed a strange operation. He separated himself from what had seemed until now a gigantic paunch, a monstrous distortion. He stood, become small and thin, sweating foully in his brown sheep's coat, blinking his evil eyes in the glare of the light. He looked about stealthily at the inside of the cabin, and smelled curiously with his nose. "I have brought with me the feather bed," he grunted in Polish, leering at Jozefa, "on which Maryanna died. I hear they are scarce in America."

Then he turned on her roughly. "Get me my supper," he said.

Later, after old Michael had eaten, Adam returned to stand stupefied, staring across the feather bed at his father.

Old Michael wiped his mouth with his hairy wrist, and hitched about in his chair toward the stove. He sighed deeply. Then he offered his son some small part of that explanation that was his due.

"My son, I am forced to announce to you how the sufferings of your stepmother, Maryanna Zalinska, have ceased." Old Michael spoke pompously, in Polish.

Adam and Jozefa remained without speaking. Surprise had drawn the breath from their throats. To old Michael there appeared more than lack of sympathy in

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this silence. He read criticism in their continued quiet. He became uneasy. He imagined hostility.

"Unhappy is the man whose children turn against him," he whined in Polish, "forsaken in his old age! Such looks as you hurl against me crush my heart! What have I not endured in order to bring myself to you? Was I not forced to buy from Satrowski, the blacksmith, the passport, the visé, the right to enter America? Are they not difficult to obtain?"

"I have sacrificed my father's inheritance! I have uncovered my old head that you, my son, together with my grandsons and great-grandsons, may have profit!"

Old Michael's cracked voice paused. Still Adam stood silent. He understood now—his father had entered this country by fraud. He had purchased his place in the quota. He had bought from Satrowski, the blacksmith, the passport, the right to enter America. He must have been forced to pay a great sum.

The look on his son's face began to alarm old Michael. He commenced to bluster, to throw his short arms about. "Your suspicions bow my old head," he raved. "I will go and take out my life . . . I will take it out with my own hand! Let the priest refuse me burial . . . since my son refuses to receive me."

When the children came home old Michael was still ranting to cover his shame and alarm. He had become as distended by fear by his son's reception as the brown bedtick on the floor was distended with feathers.

Michalina stepped gingerly over the mound and of-

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ferred her grandfather the tips of her fingers to shake. She did not offer to kiss his scabby hand.

Old Michael stopped blubbering and looked appraisingly at Michalina's prettiness. "The Lord has blessed you!" he cried, hoarsely. "He will send you also a rich husband of America!"

Jeddy sniffed at the feather bed. The boys could not tug him away. Hairs stood up on his neck, stiff with suspicion. He could not be coaxed nearer old Michael, or be made to vouchsafe him any welcome other than a stiffened neck and muffled growls.

It was from old Michael that Jozefa first heard about the new church in Lovna.

When she was alone with the old man in the kitchen, on the first morning after his arrival, she began to ask for news of her native land. She could hardly keep herself to her tasks, so eager was she to hear. Questions were seething within her; they bubbled onto her tongue. "The church is gone," she said in Polish. "Tony says it fell down in the war."

"They are building a new church in Lovna," stated old Michael, importantly, settling his round astrakhan cap firmly on his head and seating himself at table to wait while Jozefa was cooking his breakfast.

"Yes, they build a new church," the old man continued. He slipped down in his chair, stretched out his short legs, and sniffed the odor of boiling cabbage. It pleased him to ration out news to a hungry listener.

"Father Polc asks for money. He suggests that some may even be persuaded to send help from America. In

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America, he says, there is plenty. Every one is rich in America. There may be some in America, he says, who still think on God and remember their native land."

At these words, expressed with insinuation by old Michael, Jozefa felt a quick clutch at her heart. Ah, to be one of the fortunate to aid in rebuilding the church! She was unable to picture Lovna without the church. It had been to her what the inn was to old Michael, a center for companionship, an outlet for emotion. And more than that, it had been the expression of beauty, tangible uplift, solidity of hope. All this Jozefa felt in her heart while lacking the power to form it in words. She relived the loneliness, the heart-sinking, that flooded her thirteen years ago when she found no church in Harry's Mill. Even Adam suffered homesickness in those days. Then Jozefa had found the church three miles away, and Adam had found the still of the Pestwickis'.

Jozefa longed to send money for the new church. She longed for it with her whole heart. She was homesick; her heart burst in this foreign land. Was it not better, the blessing of the home church? There she had been christened. There the banns had been called. There Adam Zalinski had married her in a white dress.

Jozefa possessed money of her own. There were sixty dollars in the bank in Milesbrough in her name. She had brought it with her from Lovna. It was the first installment of her dowry; the only one her brother, Stanislaw, had ever paid. Adam had never claimed it. Jozefa had never spent it. The fingers of fear held her

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from ever drawing it out of the bank. She hoarded it. It was to pay for Masses for her soul when she was gone.

Jozefa Zalinska had the peasant's concentrated shrewdness. To her a cow or a pig as truly represented riches as did actual coins. She knew whence came each bit of their wealth and whither it was likely to go. She had brought with her to America the dread of old age. She felt instinctively the different standards in this new land. Would her children, brought up here in America, feel the duty of honoring and supporting her when she was old? Greater even than fear of being left uncared for in this world was the dread that her soul would be left unprayed in purgatory.

As his father sat eating his breakfast on this first morning after his coming, Adam Zalinski entered the hut.

The idea of not sheltering old Michael, of not sharing with him all that they had, would never have occurred to Adam and Jozefa. Who would care for old Michael was not even a question. The question was how much property had the old man brought with him toward his maintenance?

As his father volunteered no enlightenment, Adam asked him abruptly how much money the farm in Lovna had brought at the sale.

Old Michael's slant eye-slits flashed out a quick glance at his son. "Do not have hope that the farm will bring much money," he said in Polish. "There is no one alive that has much money to pay. But at least things can't go on so bad with me here," he hurried to add, adroitly

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changing the subject, "as they have gone on with me at home."

Old Michael shook his head, heavy with self-pity, over a spoonful of hot cabbage. "My son, I have suffered greatly. My wife, Maryanna, was ill continually.

"No sooner had I fetched her home than she took to her bed. She was unable to work. She could only nag, day and night, with her tongue. Her children and relatives swarmed over the place. There was no order in my house, only uproar.

"It was hard for me to be thus cheated of my marriage. Maryanna lay flat as a shadow. It was unlikely she would last long."

In this way old Michael whiningly evaded the direct question of his son as to how much money the farm brought at the sale.

"Doubtless the Dubaks plotted," stated Adam. "They hoped to get the farm when you were no more."

"Ah, my son, I was willing to sell the farm, but would you have me throw it away? It is better, as he said, for my wife's brother, Bronek Jahowski, to sell it now I am gone, and send me the money. I can then pay that scoundrel Sadwinski the little I owe."

Gradually it became clear. Old Michael had come away without selling the farm, without paying his debt. Moreover, he had brought with him in his pocket only the worth of one hundred American dollars.

In order to cloak his own failure he now turned his tongue on the man he had wronged. "Believe if you will," cried old Michael, whipping himself into anger,

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"the lies hurled against me! Who is there to protect me? As for that Stanislaw S., tell him to swallow his tongue in his head. May it choke him! He fills up the whole village with slanders against me. That old man, his father, Josef Sadwinski . . . how he strutted . . . how he kept his head high! He expected us to address him as High Honorable. Now he is dead; his mightiness has passed on. His farm is in poor hands. This Stanislaw, the son, no wonder he is soured. Nothing goes well with him. He has no occupation. He sits all day and watches the walls of the church arise. He says, if he had anything to sell, he would sell and give to the church, but he has nothing to sell. His two sons, big lazy louts, sit and drink. They make no attempt to rebuild their house that was burned."

Thus old Michael continued, anxious to divert attention from himself, eager to slander the man he had robbed.

"For years your brother has refused to write you," he exclaimed vindictively to Jozefa, "because he fears Adam will press him to pay your inheritance. If he writes now it is because he knows how you prosper."

Jozefa was moved to resentment more by the sneer than by the lie in old Michael's words. "What wrong has he done to you," she demanded, hotly, in Polish, "that you reach out and lash him with your tongue? It is true," she went on, "my brother took the farm when our father was old. It is true he agreed to pay me my dowry in cash. I cannot press him. Tears swell in my throat whenever I remember him. He has nothing to

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share. He has no inheritance only misery. How can he pay without selling the land? How can he sell the land when our father forbade it? And there is no one to buy.

"As for you . . . why are you against him? Because he who has nothing will not lend you . . . you who have never paid back the forty rubles he lent you formerly before the war?"

In spite of Jozefa's defense, old Michael continued: "I urged your brother to be present at my third wedding. He was too proud to show his face in my house. Was he afraid he'd be asked to pay toward dressing the bride?"

Jozefa was forced to close her ears to these sneers. She refused to poison them longer with the lies of old Michael. She flung a shawl over her head, went out of the kitchen, and hurried away to her morning's work in the fields. When she came home at noon to cook dinner, her lips were pressed. She had locked her anger away in her heart.

Chapter Four

OLD MICHAEL had brought with him from Poland only the worth of one hundred American dollars. If he had more in his pocket when he started he must have thrown it into the sea.

Yet last winter the onions sold well. This failure of old Michael to bring with him a greater sum did not put off for long the buying of the proud house. In June Adam bought it. He bought it from Doubrette Bros. Real Estate and Insurance, Milesbrough, Vt. The ceremony of signing the papers in Lawyer Kilpatrick's office was attended by all the solemnity of a funeral, all the import of a wedding.

On that day Adam and Jozefa walked to Milesbrough in the cool of the morning, while old Michael rode the three miles with Peter Pestwicki, Peter's oldest girl, Hela, driving them in the Ford.

During the few weeks since he came Hela Pestwicki had ingratiated herself with old Michael. Indeed, it was necessary to hurry his small funds into a safe place before Hela picked all of his dollars out of his pocket.

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It was a June morning, a fair day. Down the path from the cabin to the road Jozefa walked at Adam's heels. Jeddy stalked behind, his legs stiff with pride in those he attended.

The hut where the Zalinskis lived was a small barn, that at one time had been used as a henhouse. A shed for the cow had been added. Michalina had hung curtains of cheap chintz at the windows in the American fashion. Around the yard a miscellaneous barricade of discarded doors, wooden boxes, torn shutters, and chicken wire failed to obstruct the passage of adventurous hens. All about lay fields of rich loam, stretching from the river to the foothills.

The little procession of man, woman, and dog followed the grassy ruts south, along the willows, to where the river road merged into the one street of Harry's Mill.

Jozefa's feet were bare, but in her hand she carried her Sunday shoes. She was a large woman, her bones covered by firm muscles, accustomed to the hardest kind of field labor. She walked with the swing of a man. Taller than her husband, for Adam was short, she had much of the stateliness of her father, of Jozef Sadwinski, now dead in the homeland. A cotton dress of figured purple flopped round her ankles.

Adam Zalinski bought the clothing for his family. He attended regularly the "Dollar Day" sales, held twice a year in Milesbrough. He would pick out the largest as well as the cheapest of the marked-downs for

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Jozefa, so that these garments were often too ample even for her big frame.

The glistening-white headsquare tied under her chin framed her brow, broad and serene, while its corners hung down to her shoulders in the back.

Adam walked stiffly in his dusty black boots, his shoulders held rigid under the coat of the thick black ready-made, purchased for Sundays. The shiny white collar was too large for his neck. No tie graced its closing. Adam's hair, eyebrows, and drooping mustache were all of the same lusterless black as the derby hat; the thick perspiring skin of his forehead was deeply furrowed; his eyes dull and vacant. Into his face had sunk that look of strain and bewilderment that stamps those forced to carry on the old struggle in this new land of newer problems and keener deceits.

In Jozefa's heart as she swung along was the thrill of festival. This new-born day was so young, so warm, so tender!

On the left the river laughed through the willows; blue, sparkling with innocence, all malignancy lost. To the right the fields were soft with the fuzz of new green. In house gardens corn was pushing up, arching tender blades above the blue-green of young cabbages and the reddish leaves of the beets.

In the air was the smell of morning; sun warming the moistened earth. The sky rose of volatile azure, to the hills sank the deeper blue. "No harm can ever come to this land," thought Jozefa, some of the sparkle spat-

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tering into her eyes. "It is a land God loves with His heart."

As Adam and Jozefa were nearing Wobblenski's store they met Stella Jawuska and Mary Staszkos starting north to work in the fields. They wore headsquares tied under heavy chins; Stella's of pink, Mary's of orange. The women were dressed in their husbands' old pants, with sacks bound round the knees for weeding onions. A group of small children ran here and there about them. Each mother pushed a baby-carriage before her, a pink department-store confection, proof that last year's onions had sold well.

The weather was fair. The onions grew high. Yet, last week, Jan Jawuski and Stan Staszkos had gone away to Chicopee-Mass, to work in the mill. They had no land, yet they quarreled and refused to hire out longer to Adam.

Jozefa greeted Stella and Mary in Polish. "May Jesus Christ be praised!" she said, and the two women lifted their eyes and answered, gravely, "Forever and forever!"

The first Poles to buy land in New England settled in the Connecticut Valley. By the time the Zalinskis got here in 1914, the broad fertile plains of western Massachusetts and Connecticut had all been bought up and were held by prosperous tobacco and onion planters. Land in the lower valley of the Connecticut River was held, if for sale at all, at prohibitively high prices. The Poles had already begun to push back into the hills, into the narrower, poorer uplands of Massachusetts and Ver-

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mont. Only willingness to labor like serfs, to force field-work on their women and children, could bring success from farming these stony northern acres.

Harry's Mill was originally a settlement of Yankee farmers. Its one street followed the river from north to south, until, still following the river, it made a blunt turn southwestward and became the Milesbrough Road.

Along the river bank a screen of willows half hid a few ruinous sheds and tin-can dumps. On the other side of the road was a row of three stately houses under tall New England elms. These Colonial homesteads of the original settlers were now owned by Poles ("Polacks" the old-time New Englander calls his peaceful conquerors); front dooryards of beaten earth over-run by chickens and children; daintily carved front-door jambs intensely grimed and, within, sacred square New England parlors crammed with the cabbages of these new kings of the soil.

South of this row of houses was Wobblenski's store, with a false two-story front, a sign in dingy black and gold, a narrow wooden porch, and gaudily-painted gasoline pump. Next to the store stood the schoolhouse with faded red clapboards and tumble-down shed. From there to the turn in the road straggled a few whitish cottages and weather-beaten shanties; while to the west, behind the village, a small hill rose abruptly, topped by the scrub-oaks that sheltered the cabins of Mary Kublic and the Gutfinskis.

There were in all, before the flood, twenty homes

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in Harry's Mill. The Poles who inhabited these planted onions.

Adam plodded soberly on through the village, his feet falling heavily, his neck stiff in his white collar, his eyes on the road. Jozefa followed, with Jeddy close behind. The sun grew warm. Jozefa's brown face under the sedate white headsquare became moist and shiny.

As they passed Wobblenski's store with its orange gasoline pump, a flame of pride with its burn of sorrow passed through Jozefa. It was Stanley Wobblenski, richest man in the village, who had married Stasia, their oldest girl, now dead two years.

At the right, backed by the hill and bounded on two sides by the Milesbrough road where it turned, was the prosperous farm of Slambowski's, its wide-verandaed white farmhouse placed near the road.

To the left was the house of Wobblenski, on higher ground, on the little promontory that jutted out like an elbow into the river.

Tears pressed Jozefa's eyes as she approached it. It was a small, brown, one-story house of three rooms. It stood backed by a grove of white birches. Between their thin trunks shown the gleam of the river. Sun lay warm on the red side of the barn. Two cows with white flanks sunk hoofs in the muck of the yard.

To Adam and Jozefa the marriage of Stasia to Wobblenski, seven years ago, without dowry, had seemed security for their old age. Wobblenski owned the house, together with two cows, the store, and the gasoline pump.

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The marriage had already been blessed by two sons. Soon, please God, they would christen another. For again in August, two years ago, Stasia awaited the stork. On a Wednesday she weeded onions on her knees. On a Thursday she was delivered of a child that was dead.

Father O'Keefe had come from Milesbrough with the Lord Jesus in an auto. It was on St. Lawrence, two years ago, that Stasia died. She left behind her two children, Peter and Leon.

Peter was now six. He went to school to learn. Leon was feeble in stomach. Pray God he might be better soon!

As Adam and Jozefa, followed by Jeddy, turned away westward at the curve in the road, they met Mary Slambowska crossing from her home to Wobblenski's. She was a woman tall as Jozefa, but who carried unpleasantness in her face. She had thrown a soiled checked apron over her head and was striding hurriedly across the road. She flung back only a surly, "Forever," to the "Praised be Jesus!" of Jozefa.

Stasia was dead. Stanley was forced to pay for a woman. Mary Slambowska came in by the day. Her husband permitted it. She cooked and washed. She also ate. And you may be sure she didn't allow her own man, together with their ten children, to starve. "A woman is costly to hire," thought Jozefa. "It's well Stan has all that money. He must be rich as a Jew."

Stasia! her first born! Whenever Jozefa passed that house her heart seemed to burst with remembrance. Stasia! God's will be done! She was not beautiful, but

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she was good. Before she was married to Wobblenski young Ripkar had sat with her in the evenings. He was a nice boy. He was not tall, but his face was noble. Stasia was fond of him, but he had no land and she no dowry. When her father arranged for her a rich marriage, she had been gentle, she had not complained, she had forced herself to send young Ripkar away.

Stasia Wobblenska. She had lived for twenty-three years when she died. She had been a good wife. She had worked hard. She had helped Wobblenski to prosper.

Yet it was balm to the heart to remember. There had been a hearse with white flowers. Many had walked to the grave. Stanley had paid for the Mass. Jozefa prayed for her continually. Her soul had found peace.

High Mass had been celebrated in the church in Milesbrough. There was no church in Harry's Mill. The funeral had been well attended; all whom they knew, it might be a hundred; Mary Kublic and her children, Mary and Jozef Slambowski, and their children, Stella Jawuska, the Stazkos, even the Pestwickis, those detestable ones.

Stasia's two children grew well. But Mary Slambowska wasn't the kind to work for kisses. Soon Wobblenski would be forced to look about him and find a new wife. Was it likely that she would consider the parents of Stasia when they were old? Michalina? Whenever Jozefa spoke to Michalina about Wobblenski, she would answer crossly. "Gee, cut it out, ma!" she would say.

During that June morning the ceremony of buying

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the proud house from Doubrette Bros. was carried out in the dingy upstairs office of Lawyer Kilpatrick in Milesbrough. Strange, it seemed to Jozefa, that it was not blessed in the church.

Adam Zalinski was unable to read and write. He was forced to leave the business to others. About one thing he was firm, there must be no mortgage. The new house must be paid for in full. This prejudice was part of his soul. A mortgage falls like a curse. A mortgage rubs like a shoe.

Old Michael was quite as illiterate as his son. Yet he made himself master of ceremonies. He paid down out of his own pocket the first one hundred dollars of the whole two thousand, three hundred that was the immense cost of a house. In this way he contrived to have the deed put in his name. What matter? Old Michael was not long for this world. When he was gone the house would fall by inheritance to Adam.

On the evening of that day old Michael followed close on the heels of his son. They took the dirt path in the dark across the onion lands to the house of the Pestwickis'. Until late in the night old Michael and Adam drank with Peter Pestwicki. They celebrated together the purchase of the proud house.

While her men were gone Jozefa sat writing in the kitchen of the hut. It was the last evening she would sit here. Tomorrow they would move to the proud house. Excitement burned in Jozefa. It heated her temples and flamed in her ears. There was a double joy in her heart tonight, for today Adam had purchased more

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than a house. After the recording of the deed in Milesbrough he had gone across the square from the courthouse to the post-office. He had bought a money-order for the worth of forty rubles. This they had sent to Stanislaw Sadwinski, to pay off the debt long owed by old Michael.

Michalina lay languid on a bed in one corner of the cabin. She was scratching Tally's warm throat. The cat, her eyes closed, her head thrown back, a beatific grin on her yellow jowl, responded by voluptuously spreading and closing her paws.

The evening was warm, the air humid and heavy, no thunderstorm had come tonight to ease its pressure. The two boys and little Katherine were asleep in the front room. There all was quiet and dark.

The smell of Jeddy's warm body as he lay on the floor, his hairy side rising and lowering, the odor of human sweat dried into clothing, of cabbages, and chicken droppings were all blended by the heat of the stove in that small room.

Jozefa bent to her writing.

"Dear Brother," she wrote in Polish: "We have bought for ourselves a new house. There are many windows. They glitter like eyes in the sun.

"We have our proud house, two acres of land; for stock, a cow, a calf, seventeen hens, and a pig. My heart sings like a bird. Would that its singing might reach your ears!

"You will receive a notice, brother. It is a postal

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money-order for 20 dollars. Adam sends you these 20 dollars. They are to pay off the old debt that Michael, his father, failed to repay. For this order at the post-office they will give you the worth of 40 rubles. Adam cannot spare more at this time.

"Dear brother: I will send the photo as soon as possible. I will show you the windows of the rooms. The walls are of wood painted orange. There is flat tin, not thatch, on the roof. When the weather is cold our house will keep warm. We have two good stoves."

Jozefa concluded her letter explaining about that money-order sent by honest Adam to pay off the debt of his father.

Long before this letter reached Poland, the family Zalinski had moved into the proud house. But on the very day after the moving, Adam Zalinski lay dead in his new home.

Part II: Riches

Chapter One

FORTY rubles! A fortune!

Stanislaw Sadwinski stirred in his bed.

Forty rubles. Thought of forty rubles had smoldered all night in his brain. With waking, consciousness blew like the breath of a bellows; memory of forty rubles flamed into bright golden warmth.

In the pocket of Sadwinski's cloak was a notice. It had come yesterday. He'd got it from the post-office.

For that money order, at the post-office they would pay Sadwinski the worth of forty rubles.

Forty rubles! A fortune!

Julka lay in the other half of the bed. The bed was placed on straw on the earth floor in a corner of the barn. The barn was an enormous cave, ill-lighted, damp. They'd saved the feather bed when the house was burned. The Russian soldiers, cursed dogs, had burned it. There was little enough they had saved.

Sadwinski rolled to the edge of the bed and picked himself up. In his youth he had been a man of good height, though never the equal in size of his father,

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Jozef Sadwinski, head villager of Lovna and like a general in carriage.

Now at fifty Stanislaw was bent and skinny. His body might have been that of a shrunken old woman. The flabby skin of his face was gray. The spikes on his chin, the disordered tufts of his hair, were gray. Only his dark eyes told of his handsome young-manhood.

There was one small dirty window high up in the south side of the barn. It threw down a band of light across the gloom. This beat with distressing concentration into the eyes whenever the eyes came in line with its beam. The floor was damp. The air was stagnant and dead. From under the walls old dung of cattle, many times frozen and thawed, gave out a stale, moldy smell.

With his finger nails Sadwinski combed the straws from his hair. He picked them from his sleeves. He knelt down on the earth, pulling a corner of the bed-tick under his knees, and said his prayers. This was his toilet. He wore all his clothes to bed. Even in summer he'd have been glad if there were more.

As soon as his prayers were said Stanislaw got up stiffly. He slipped his hand into the pocket of his cloak. The notice was there. His fingers touched it. A shock of warmth ran from its cool sides. Forty rubles! Stanislaw forgot the ache in his knees. His body felt no longer the damp enveloping chill of the barn. He had even paid less attention than usual to his prayers. A mist of golden joy swirled in his brain. He was powerless to pull his hand from his pocket. He stood there, the nails

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of his right hand scratching across the side of the smooth square.

Lucky he had been alone when he got it! Jan and Stefan had not been with him. He had opened the letter last evening, walking home down the long street of the village, picking his way through the ruts. Jan and Stefan didn't know. Julka, sleeping, didn't know. Stanislaw had tossed about during the first half of the night. He'd slept fitfully during the second half, with that hidden warmth, that golden warmth, seething in his brain.

If Jan and Stefan knew, they'd try to worry and tease it out of him. They'd expect a part of the money at least for vodka. Forty rubles. It must be disposed with forethought. It must be dispensed with care. Never again in his lifetime would he lay hand on forty rubles.

Sadwinski shuffled across the earthy floor of the barn. He passed through the single beam of light and over the square patch where it fell like a rug on the floor, a barred square rug of yellow morning light.

In a dark corner an improvised stove of blackened bricks and broken tiles served for the family cooking and gave out such warmth as they had. A few benches were the furniture.

Jan and Stefan were asleep in the loft overhead. A little straw softened the floor. It would be hours before they'd stir, and stretch themselves, and come down the ladder, and go out to see if the June sun had any warmth in its beams.

From rafters near the stove cobwebs hung in thick,

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sooty curtains like hangings of rotted crêpe. Sadwinski forced into the opening a few chips and some twists of straw. A wee crackling and lines of glow about the warped iron door cheered the dingy corner of the barn.

Soon breakfast of soggy potatoes steamed on the stove. They were last year's potatoes that had been frozen, their flesh veined black, their hearts foul with decay. They steamed in two large American tomato-cans. The soldiers, the dogs, had seen to it that they overlooked no metal cooking-pot of any kind. Stanislaw remembered the row of Julka's cheerful copper pans and brass ladles . . . long ago now . . . long ago. . . .

Stanislaw Sadwinski, crouching forward from the bench and watching his potatoes cook, warmed himself from the ascending steam. He began to form in his mind, to even whisper with his lips, the letter he would write today to his sister Jozefa in America.

Stanislaw often felt the impulse to write, yet lethargy of starved body and mind had long ago cut him off from the exercise of this his one talent. The letters so bravely planned were never written.

His father, Jozef Sadwinski, had been a remarkable man; tall, vigorous in mind and body, with broad handsome face, very red skin, bushy white hair and eyebrows. He had had none of the taciturnity of the peasant. There was quick intelligence in his brown eyes.

When a boy, Father Bac, the village priest in those days, had taught young Jozef Sadwinski to read and write Polish. This was done as a crime.

It had clung about Sadwinski all his life like an aura,

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this knowledge, this almost uncanny power. Pass a little stick across a paper and teach it to give out to its recipient the very thoughts you wanted him to have! To Sadwinski's neighbors this seemed magic.

In a day when it was still forbidden, Jozef Sadwinski had secretly instructed his children. He had taught Stanislaw and Jozefa to read and write Polish.

Now the war was over, bans were removed, the Russian yoke was lifted, Poland was free. Jozef Sadwinski was dead, and his son Stanislaw too crushed and weak to use the knowledge that his father had planted at great risk in his brain.

After the war Stanislaw had begun to receive letters again from Jozefa. He looked forward to their coming . . . the feeling of importance they gave him, these letters from his rich sister in America. What Jozefa wrote he was able to read. It was a joy, a delight, a power, a miracle, a wonder beyond words.

It was no longer forbidden to read or write Polish. Stanislaw could take Jozefa's letters openly to the inn and read them out loud. A few sleepy men would look up from their vodka, a woman perhaps pause to listen if she had sons or hopes in America. With what pride would Sadwinski swell! No musician ever felt the stimulation of an audience more.

Stanislaw now glanced up at two photographs pinned to a beam above the stove. That faded one, taken years ago before they left Lovna, was the wedding picture of Adam Zalinski and Jozefa Sadwinska. The brighter of

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the two photographs had been sent from America. It was of their oldest girl, Stasia.

Jozefa, thought Stanislaw, there in America! For years the thought of her had given him the homesick longing of a little boy. They were twins, yet Jozefa seemed older. She had cared for him tenderly; a motherless child. Stanislaw could see her now as she'd looked in the diligence when it rumbled away, before the war; color in her round cheeks, smiling and tearful; a spotless white kerchief tied under her chin; a tall content young matron; two little ones already on her knees and one under her apron. Jozefa had resembled their father, Jozef Sadwinski. Ah, she had a tear in her eye, and a warm heart, and withal a long head for the rubles under her white headsquare!

Adam Zalinski, the man she had married; solid, silent, dependable; seeming only to plod on, to labor content in the fields; never smiling, never angry, never drunk; a kind of horse-plodding, pudding of a man. Sadwinski thought of him with some scorn; a clod, and yet a clod (Sadwinski patted the notice in his pocket) from which some good deeds grew.

Old Michael Zalinski, now, the father of Adam, gone off to America last spring; a rogue, a scamp! Adam's blood must be that of his mother, his heavy honesty was so diverse from the bawling vices of old Michael.

Sadwinski's eyes still clung to the faint picture of Jozefa with Adam. Stasia had been their first. The next two, a boy and a girl, had passed from this world before their parents left Lovna. They were lying there up in

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the burying-ground. It was two years in August since Jozefa had written of Stasia's death and sent him her photograph.

"What a misfortune! She was a good wife. She worked hard. It would not have occurred to her to abandon us in our old age."

Stanislaw Sadwinski, waiting for his breakfast to cook, now resolved, as he had resolved a hundred times before, to write a letter, this time a letter of groveling gratitude, to his brother and sister in America.

With dim eyes, starved brain, and hungry heart he crouched over his tomato-cans, steamed his old brain limber, and began to frame mentally his reply to that immensely important notice that came from the post-office yesterday.

"Lovna, June," he would write. Sadwinski couldn't remember to what saint this day belonged. It would remain always in his mind marked out as the day on which he went to the post-office and received his forty rubles. He must find out from Julka what saint's day it was, this day on which such good fortune arrived . . . a candle perhaps in the church for thankfulness. The year he knew was the Lord's, 1927; seven years since the Russian devils had finally left Lovna. What use to drive them out after they'd wasted everything?

"To Adam and Jozefa Zalinska," Stanislaw planned to write, "and I begin in these words, may Jesus Christ be praised!" And once again he would write, "May Jesus Christ be praised! And you will answer, Forever and forever!" So much so good, thought Stanislaw. But there

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was a fullness of the heart waiting to overflow in expression. This first formal greeting out of the way, what a stream of gratitude to his brother and sister in that golden land would burst forth in written words!

Sadwinski sat tracing the sentences of this imaginary letter with his tongue on the roof of his mouth. They were characters he was certain his grateful heart would soon force his stiffened hand to pen. He had not written a word for years. Jozefa couldn't know if he received her letters. She complained that he gave her no proof that he lived. But now . . . this very day, he would go down to the inn, he would beg the use of a pen, he would actually write down these words having sonorous inception in his brain. "Brother Adam! Sister! I bless you. I bless you that you send me this help in the form of these rubles."

Ah, in America, thought Sadwinski, there are as many dollars as trees! Why had he not gone to America when he was young, when the way was open? One could earn in America, then return here and spend. It had been the hand of Fate, that old stepmother, that restrained him. Evil had rained on him ever since he was born. He had been unlucky, the weak one of twins. If his foot pressed the land, nothing grew. It was his cow that died, his pig that was stolen.

There had been no war in America. In America there was plenty. Their barns were full. Their fields were not scraped away. In America everyone prospered. God had blessed them in America. It was a land the Virgin smiled on; a land God made glad.

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The war was over. They had opened a post-office in Lovna. They said that Poland was free, that the fear of bullets had ceased. The fear of bullets . . . ah, it was better than the gnawing of hunger!

But what use to grumble?

Yesterday this notice came. It was as Jozefa said, her father-in-law, old Michael Zalinski, had never paid back those forty rubles lent him before the war. It was now many years. Sadwinski had refused interest. He'd said, "Michael Zalinski is a friend, a relative" (though in late years it had been little honor to so claim him).

Now Adam had seen to it that all turned out well. Those forty rubles, lent when there was plenty, had become like money put away for future years. As birds, treated kindly in a summer long ago, today they returned . . . yes, with food in their bills!

He must eat his breakfast . . . be off. He must be at the post-office as soon as it opened to collect his forty rubles.

There was little to eat, only black bread and potatoes that had been frozen. If Cousin Jocimba sent in sour milk or bacon fat, it was, alas, bitter from charity. When Stanislaw went to the post, when he looked at last on those forty rubles, how they would look like the hand of God stretched out to feed their mouths!

The first thing to do after getting the money, Stanislaw now decided, would be to look up Stan Linko and pay him for plowing the fields. It was a year ago last fall that Linko had come and plowed. There'd be no charge, he'd said, for the plowing. Yet Stanislaw had

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insisted on pledging ahead a part of his crops. But his health had been poor. Neither Jan nor Stefan had been able to plant fields. They'd have been ready for planting this spring if they had not been choked up with weeds. And now, God knew, it was June; already too late to start planting.

Yes, Stanislaw resolved, he'd pay Linko, although Linko would insist he owed nothing. It was a debt of gratitude, a debt of honor, the debt of a Sadwinski. Freedom from debt is peace in the soul. Peace in the soul is better than a full meal.

Sadwinski's dry tongue traced these precepts on the upper ridges of his mouth while the tomato-cans bubbled with an enthusiasm unusual on that stove. A little salt on the half-cooked potatoes; Stanislaw's breakfast was eaten out of one of the cans. It was soon over. For once his mind was not on food. He must hurry in order to reach the post-office as soon as it opened. He wouldn't disturb his family. He would explain to them when he returned how he'd been forced to go down to the inn in order to write in a convenient place a letter to his sister in America, to Jozefa Zalinska.

Stanislaw's long-skirted cloak was already on. He had inherited the garment from his father. It was too long for him, too big in the shoulders. He wore it perpetually at home and abroad except at such times as he lent it to Jan or Stefan. Then he'd take to his bed or stir up the fire as substitute.

As preparation for going out he now stood up and

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bound the cord tighter about his waist. He'd grown thinner. Ah, how much thinner he had grown!

Julka lay in the bed. Her eyes were shut. The ray of light from the one window was bright sunshine now. It had moved across the barn until it lay like a square golden rug across her feet. By the time she awoke the flakes of dancing dust would have moved to caress her face, to glare bewilderingly into her eyes.

Ah, how much more bewildered her eyes would be if they could see forty rubles!

If once she could lay hands on them, how Julka would hoard them, how she'd refuse to spend those forty rubles! How she'd cherish them; how she'd forbid anyone to touch them! She would hide them under her side of the feather bed, she would keep them for Masses for her soul when she was gone.

Their neighbor, Mary Jesyk, three months back, had given all her fortune, two hundred zlotys or more, to Father Polc before she died. It was for prayers for her soul. She had left her man, Jan Jesyk, slowly dying. His leg had been crushed in the forest; and seven children to feed. Mary Jesyk had thought only of her soul.

Across Julka's face the skin lay like a crumpled, rust-colored veil over the bones of a skull. Her hair was gone, her eyes sunken. All day she prayed softly or had sense enough to keep quiet. Her beads were tied by a shred of white cloth to her wrist. If she dropped them she wouldn't have strength enough to reach them.

Now Julka opened her eyes. The radiant square of sunlight lay across the little mound of her body. What

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a glittering cover to wrap poor Julka's bones! The band of light had not reached her eyes. She watched while Stanislaw lashed about him his cloak. He pretended not to see that her eyes were open. He neglected to greet her. But some gleam in her eyes . . . did she know he had money? Her eyes looked as though she knew. If only she could lay hands on it, how she would tuck it away under the mattress!

"I'll buy a rabbit," thought Sadwinski. "With its bones I'll make Julka some broth. After all, she only lies there in bed because there's no food suitable to give her strength to get up."

He pushed open the great door of the barn and stepped out of the damp cavern into the warmth of the June day. His eyes, coming suddenly from shadow, brimmed over with the shine of the sun. He stood trying to blink them clear, to look down the long road that ran the length of the village.

Chapter Two

BEFORE the World War the low wooden farmhouse of Jozef Sadwinski had stood on a little rise of ground at the west end of the village. As Stanislaw Sadwinski paused by the door of the barn on this June morning in 1927, some remnants of charred beams lay at his feet. Two rows of poplar stumps told of the dignified avenue that used to lead to the door. No trees left now nearer than the forest; even there the Russian devils had wantonly destroyed.

Here at one side of the ruins of the house was a mound of earth, about twelve feet across. It covered an old pit where the servants of Stanislaw's father used to bury vegetables in winter below frost line. Stanislaw had often planned to dig in this mound. It might yet contain some forgotten potatoes not wholly rotted away. What a Sadwinski discarded in those days would now seem a feast. But Sadwinski's spade was broken, his muscles and will were weak.

Now as he stood looking out over the village his mind was on other matters. For once his imagination

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didn't pause to play over this mound, to speculate about what treasures it might contain. A man with forty rubles doesn't stoop and dig like a dog.

It was a fair day, sunny and blue. Sadwinski filled his lungs with fresh light air. Such quiet, nobody around; only the barking of a dog, it sounded like Linko's hound, over by the edge of the forest. Linko was the kind; he'd have been up working since four. His grandfather, Peter Linko, a bent old man, had hired out to Jozef Sadwinski when Stanislaw was a boy. Yet every night now that dog over there was given a bone that Stanislaw would have been glad to get his hands on.

He stood thinking with satisfaction of how, today, he'd pay Linko. That act was going to put the present Sadwinski and the present Linko back into their proper relation of master and hireling.

Stanislaw started down the gentle slope. The new post-office lay to the east at the end of the village. The street was a wandering, twisting, seemingly directionless series of muddy ruts, full of the prints of feet and hoofs. Cottages of whitewashed bricks formerly bordered the road; set down haphazard like uneven teeth. Now on many of the farms rose only fragments of blackened walls, old roots in a jaw.

There was no sidewalk. Stanislaw picked his way among rank grass growing beside the paling on the south side of the ruts. He had been a tall man; now he stooped. His gray head was bared to the sun. His father's full-skirted cloak of thick fine maroon-colored

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cloth was faded and threadbare; its edging of fur and embroidery had worn away.

The first cottage on the right was Karniki's, the wife-killer. It stood empty. Fire refused to burn it. The wind shunned it. Its grayed thatch was not even badly torn, though the place had been neglected now for over a year. No beggar was so homeless, no outcast so cold, that he'd endure its shelter. Karniki had thought of his hunger before his soul. Even now in the safe light of morning Sadwinski crossed himself hastily as he passed the wife-murderer's hut.

Next on the right, standing back in the field, was the mean shelter of Jesyk, half dugout, half blackened bricks; such a place as wouldn't serve in winter to keep potatoes from freezing. Mary Jesyk had remembered only her soul. She had paid for her salvation with the hunger of her little ones.

Stan Linko'd rebuilt his house of bricks, newly white-washed, with yellow thatch. He and his sons had worked mightily on those four walls during three winters. A good house, five windows this way looking onto the road, and more at the back. Linko was always in luck; whatever he did, luck and the weather always on his side. And today something coming his way that he wasn't expecting; good money dropping out of free heaven into his hand! He'd got himself horses, powerful and gray, such beasts as hadn't been seen here in Lovna since Jozef Sadwinski plowed with his six. The soldiers had left the houses leveled, the fields scraped for earth-

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works. They'd driven off every creature except the sick, left starving by the roadside.

Stanislaw turned in toward the byre of Stan Linko. He met a barefoot farm-girl in a red skirt; Mary Sulewska hired out to Linko to help in the milking and sausage-mixing. The girl regarded Sadwinski with stupid brown eyes. He thought of her mother, another Mary Sulewska. She'd been farm-girl on his father's place some years before the war.

Stanislaw greeted the Sulewska and asked where he could find her master. "For I must pay him what I owe," he announced pompously. "He may be in a hurry for his money."

Mary Sulewska looked at him stolidly from under heavy brows. She didn't speak, only motioned her head stupidly toward the inn. She seemed vague as to where her master was. She waddled off on bare feet through the muck of the yard.

A little farther on, past the ruin of several houses, was the home of Satrowski. The blacksmith had rebuilt. Pausing, Sadwinski looked across the wide stretch of black mud that was the one street of Lovna. Over there the road to Zilnik branched off. It started north between the inn and the place where the old church used to stand, where the new walls were rising.

Sounds of life were audible now throughout the village; men's voices from the fields, women singing in the farmyards. From over by the mill-pond came the barking of dogs. Geese hissed by the roadside, lifting up their long necks at Sadwinski like flexible white gun-barrels.

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The sun burned out earthy odors. From fields and cowsheds rose the reek of warmed manure.

Stanislaw Sadwinski plodded on past the house of Cousin Jacimba, still half ruin. The miller had never rebuilt the mill. They drew the grain to Zilnik now to be ground by steam. Jacimba's wife had died in the spring. Their one child, Jadwiga, had been married, the year the war started, to Leopold Sadwinski, a cousin of Stanislaw's. Such feasting! The memory of that festival not even war could efface. Yet Jadwiga, they said, didn't even know that her mother was dead. It was years since the girl was shut up in the madhouse in Zilnik.

Cousin Jacimba must have slaughtered a calf. Evidence of this held Sadwinski's eyes. The hide was tacked up for curing on the east side of the barn. Oil dripped from the fleshy side.

The last farm before the post-office was Zalinski's. It had been in the family for more years than any one could remember. Old Michael Zalinski, before he left for America, had given it away, for less than was nothing, to Bronek Jahowski, the brother of his third wife. They'd got the old man drunk at the inn.

The Zalinski homestead, of bricks painted white, was one of the few houses left standing by the Russians. Yet now its paint peeled, its bricks dropped, its tiles were torn loose by the wind. "Shiftlessness destroys faster than war," moralized Sadwinski, as he stopped and looked up at the old house. "Its destruction is fully as great."

A year ago, how old Michael had boasted! He was

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going to America, he said. His granddaughter, Stasia, now dead, had been married to a rich man. She'd been married to Wobblenski. Wobblenski was greater than the President in America. He was a very great man.

How old Michael had boasted! How he had drunk and swaggered! How he had boasted at the inn! His son, Adam, he said, would send a ship's ticket. He would bring him to America. Wobblenski would send him a ship. He would send many ships.

Finally, in last August, what a come-down! He who had boasted so big as to almost burst his mouth succeeded in getting himself married instead, and what a shame . . . that Maryanna Dubak . . . that hag . . . that Jew's servant! The old scoundrel had thrown away his chance to go to America, and then got no good from his marriage. Sadwinski congratulated himself that he'd attended neither the wedding nor the funeral of the bride. Nothing could have forced him to go.

Before the war Michael Zalinski had borrowed forty rubles from Stanislaw Sadwinski. Stanislaw had charged no interest. He had thought of Michael as a friend, a relative; he had not known he was a dog. As the years went on, this unpaid debt had become a bitterness between them.

Finally in last April old Michael had gone. The old scamp was off to America now to burden his son. He must have fallen on them like a curse! He'd gone without paying the rubles, although he had feasted his wife's relatives well on the night before he left Lovna.

It was known how he'd given the farm, together with

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what was left of the meadow, to his wife's brother, for four hundred zlotys. That was far lower than what it was worth.

Old Michael had claimed there was no one else who would buy. He'd declared there was no one able to pay. He was forced, he said, to let it go for so little. Truth was, the old wastrel preferred to carouse and drink vodka and let another man pay.

And now, a miracle! Adam had sent from America those forty rubles his father'd owed and refused to repay.

As Stanislaw walked back from the post-office along the north side of the road, he kept his hand in the pocket of his long-skirted cloak. He felt there the coins under his hand in a thin bag. They'd paid him the worth of his rubles in the coins of new Poland, new shiny zlotys. But to Stanislaw they were still his lost forty rubles, the rubles he'd lent before the war. Touch of them warmed the heart as the sun warmed the land.

He would buy . . . ah, what would he not buy? Rabbit, plump cabbages, bacon already savored his tongue. Forty rubles. A fortune. It was power poured into the hand. There is nothing one can't buy with forty rubles.

On his right, as Stanislaw now began retracing his steps through the village, was the home of Magdusia Cronek. It stood across from Cousin Jacimba's. The Croneks lived in the shed. Only one end-wall of the cottage stood. A bunch of burned thatch hung like hair

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from its top. A cross, worked out in bricks, some faded letters, still showed at the peak of the gable.

Magdusia came out in the yard. The fence had been burned for firewood. A hummock of sod stuck up where the fence had been. Six months ago Jan Cronek, Magdusia's man, had left her. He was tired of looking for work. He'd gone off. He neither wrote nor sent money. There was no smoke from the chimney, so no fire in the shed. Doubtless the children were hungry, all six of them, naked like puppies. Magdusia crossed the yard and crouched over a bare plot of ground. Her arms were skinny below her old shawl. She was pulling some hardened roots from the ground.

Forty rubles burned in Sadwinski's palm. They made him young; they made him a boy. When he was a boy he used to play pranks. He would steal up behind his grandmother and pluck at her shawl. She would cry out; a witch from the forest had got her.

Sudden joy was like to burst Sadwinski's heart. One thought filled his mind; all else was put out, as a single beam can completely fill up the eyes. "Go follow Magdusia Cronek into her shed where there is no fire. She will turn suddenly. She will scream because some one follows. Heap into her old apron forty rubles. How she will call on God! How she will pray God's Mother! How she'll implore the saints! Seven empty mouths. Holy Virgin, what a prank! Forty rubles. How Magdusia will faint from the joy of forty rubles!"

No, he didn't turn in across the weeds to the miserable hut of Magdusia. The beam passed on from filling

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his soul too full of brightness. It was all a dream, a dream and the prank of a dream; a dream that the fumes of forty rubles had let loose in his head. Yet a beautiful dream!

Sadwinski kept on down the north side of the road toward the inn. He allowed the bag of coins to drag down his pocket. Some burdens serve to lighten the heels.

"Heigh-ho!" said Sadwinski to himself, thinking of his brother-in-law and his sister Jozefa in America. "Adam would never be bothered by the impulse to play a practical joke on a grass widow."

Not Adam. He'd pay out, no doubt, whatever he or his family owed, but there'd be no wild impulses like love-children nesting in his brain. Jozefa, now, she might have impulses, but if she did she'd stifle them pretty rapidly, and as firmly as she planted her plump body on a stool.

The practicality of Jozefa now proved contagious. Stanislaw suffered a brief attack. "I'll buy at least one good coat that is warm for Jan and Stefan," he resolved. "Then perhaps they'll go out and work even in winter, not sit shivering eternally by the fire." He was vague in his mind as to what kind of work his apathetic sons would be able to accomplish even with one coat to share.

The sun was well up overhead, the day growing warm. The birds felt the heat, notes bubbled and shrilled in their throats. The new church was here, beyond Sulewski's, before you got to the road to Zilnik

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that ran north by the inn. The walls were rising bravely now, but Stanislaw felt he had no time this morning to linger and watch them rise. Yet his feet paused by habit. He leaned for a moment on the gate.

With the warmth and cheer of the sunshine sparkling down from the high blue sky, realization of what the new church was going to mean began to exalt his spirit. Ah, Mother of God, when they had back the church, the church of Our Lady, the prize, the jewel of Lovna! There would be again music and singing. Stanislaw's heart leaped up in memory. He heard again in his ears the organ; the deep voice of Satrowski boomed through the chant. Before his eyes swam the procession. Out from the gloom of the church it moved into the air and the sun. The candles flickered fainter now, the canopy over Father Polc. Old Peter Linko, Jan Sulewski, Jozef Sadwinski; so many were now dead who used to hold that canopy.

Since the church was destroyed Father Polc had come over sometimes from Zilnik and said Mass at the inn. Now he was asking for money, for the rebuilding of the church of Our Lady.

What was food in the belly? What were clothes on the bones? Stanislaw's hand closed in a spasm of emotion inside the pocket of his cloak that held the forty rubles.

He would go and lay them at the feet of Father Polc! He knew now what he'd do with his money. He was happy in his decision. He would lay it at the feet of

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Our Lady. He would lay it reverently, yet with an orgy of pride reeling within him.

Stanislaw turned eagerly into the yard of the church and went down the two steps between the half-built walls. No one about. No one was working here this morning, and Father Polc had not come over from Zilnik.

So Stanislaw went on to the inn.

There were four people in the inn-yard. Koszinski, the present innkeeper, son of that Peter Koszinski who twice robbed Jozef Sadwinski in the lawsuit, was watching a boy rub down his horse. A frowsy woman in a striped skirt was standing on a stepladder, washing a window with a cloth wrung out in a pail of filthy water, her eyes more often on the men than on her work.

Against the wall in the shade, Leopold Sadwinski, the husband of Jadwiga, lay stretched full length asleep on a bench; one long leg out, one bent at the knee. His face was covered by his cap. Through his brown hair, flung back, ran one lock of pure white. His thin-fingered hands were folded on his flute across his breast. Lately Leopold had got himself a new flute. Ah, there was beautiful sadness in the tunes that he played!

Stanislaw Sadwinski strutted across the brick-paved courtyard and asked of Koszinski the whereabouts of Stan Linko. "For I want to settle with him for plowing my field," he announced in a weak voice that he tried to inflate with importance.

The snub-nosed boy rubbing the horse looked up and

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twisted his mouth impudently. It was plain that he didn't believe.

Koszinski himself, a heavy dark man with flat skull, seemed little impressed. He bent his big shoulders and felt deliberately down a leg of the horse. He gave Sadwinski only a few grunts. Then seeing the old liar hung round like a flea, he thought it would be a joke to turn him loose on Linko. "You'll find him over there in the field by the forest," he said, indifferently.

As Stanislaw was turning to leave the inn-yard, in drove Stan Satrowski, the blacksmith, with his powerful new horse. "Look out, you fool!" he yelled angrily at Sadwinski, whom he nearly knocked down.

The new beast was restless, bad-tempered. He showed his teeth and the whites of his eyes. It was whispered about that Satrowski had bought him with money gotten out of old Michael Zalinski by selling him a passport and a place in the quota.

The blacksmith drew up in the center of the inn-yard. He was a large man with a broad face, high cheek bones, and a coarse flattened nose. He seemed to have no special business with the innkeeper. It was evident that he'd driven in to show off his horse. With a glistening new whip he played over its ears! "Hop in!" he called out to Sadwinski, making sport of the old beggar. "*You* must have business in Zilnik."

This was said in mockery, a taunt to make the on-lookers laugh. But Stanislaw didn't see the blacksmith wink as he said it.

As he spoke so, Stanislaw thought, Satrowski must

know that he had money in his pocket. After all, it was not so many years since a Sadwinski always had money in his pocket, since a Sadwinski could be seen constantly going on business to Zilnik.

Stanislaw pulled himself up to his full height. He would show them, these loafers . . . Stanislaw Sadwinski did indeed have business in Zilnik. And, in truth, hadn't he planned earlier this very morning to purchase a coat for his sons? It would be necessary to go to Zilnik to buy it. Now, as he thought of it, what better could he do than grasp at once this opportunity offered by Satrowski? He might not have another chance.

Stanislaw hesitated only a moment. "One bird of good luck flies your way," he thought, "and soon the whole flock is about your ears." Zilnik. He had not been to Zilnik for years. It lay at the end of what was a long walk for a man. And here was a chance to go in a cart instead of on foot. All those versts. No one, he thought, ought to let a chance like this go by. That was just the difference between himself and that brother-in-law of his, Adam Zalinski in America. Adam, for all he was honest, always stuck his head down and kept to the path; stumbled on, poor stupid, with eyes on the one narrow way he'd set out to follow. While Stanislaw, on the other hand, had always kept his eye cocked, even as a boy, to see golden opportunity if it chanced his way. He'd never fed a dull soul with satisfaction merely because he kept his feet in the rut. No, thank the saints! He'd always kept his eyes open. It is true this habit had netted him little, for no oppor-

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tunities of any importance had ever presented themselves to his eyes. But now at least he had imagination enough to turn aside and step quick when fortune beckoned.

Surely no sane man would let a chance like this slip by. Wasn't it going to be necessary, sooner or later, to go to Zilnik to buy Jan and Stefan the coat?

Amid the snickers and jeering grunts of those about him Stanislaw climbed into the two-wheeled cart. He sat there high up above them, as, when a boy, he'd sat by the side of his father. He felt himself raised again to his proper place. He thought of the money in his pocket. The pressure of business swelled out his mind. He, Stanislaw Sadwinski, was again a man of wealth, a man of affairs; in a word, a Sadwinski.

The horse reared for the start. He wheeled out of the inn-yard and plunged into the ruts of the road. They were off for Zilnik.

Chapter Three

SADWINSKI clung to the high springless seat by the side of the blacksmith. The road to Zilnik ran north past the east end of the inn and at right angles to the street of Lovna. It was as ridged as a field that has just been plowed, and slippery from recent rains. The ruts in places were two or three feet deep. They were miniature canals filled with slime. Even Satrowski's horse, big powerful brute, was put to heavy strain to keep his footing. He splashed and floundered.

Overhead was the peace of a cloudless sky; a June day, a perfect day, its heart of gold. The air was light and warm. Odor of sun-heated fields breathed in their faces.

Over by the round blue pond, among poplars and willows, some school children lingered, watching the ducks. They were toddlers hardly able to walk so far. No child above the age of seven was alive today in Lovna. It was necessary to have only one class in the school; the larger benches were all empty of scholars. Not a child born before 1920 had survived starvation or disease.

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The horse of Satrowski reared. His hoofs sucked and squashed through the mire. The stiff cart lurched and plunged, its wheels throwing up a stream of black mud-balls. At every moment it seemed as if they would be overturned. The high round cap of the blacksmith and Sadwinski's bare gray head were first slapped sharply together then jerked violently apart. The cart, failing to get rid of its occupants, seemed determined to crack their bones and batter the life from their flesh.

At first, after leaving the village, they passed flat fields planted with wheat and rye. Soon they were out in open undulating country. Rough bushes hedged the road, still only a welter of ruts and mud, sunk now between stretches of undrained fields. Ribs of dead horses piercing up through rank grass were more numerous than flowers.

Mounds, graves of the dead, buried where they had fallen, rose along the sides of the road; some with black crosses tossing wild arms, crazy and neglected. Those broken crosses, they made you shiver in the sun!

Here a shrine of Our Lord, stained and faded, was sheltered by a tiny roof nailed to the stump of a tree. At sight of it Stanislaw involuntarily loosened one hand from its grip on the seat and made the sign of the cross. A lurch of the cart almost threw him. Satrowski was an expert driver, yet, in uncovering his head, he nearly lost hold on the reins.

Some crows roosting on the cross were frightened off by the clattering wheels. The black fellows swooped away like lost spirits, cawing across the fields.

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Here a broad-wheeled wagon had turned aside to avoid a more deeply muddied portion of the road and left the bold imprint of its wheel across the mound of a grave. At sight of this Stanislaw's thoughts turned to his cousin, to Leopold Sadwinski, left behind there dozing by the wall. When he went off to war Leopold had been only nineteen. His young wife, Jadwiga, was forced to bury her babe by the roadside. At first she carried it about dead in her arms. She herself dug the grave. There was no priest, no coffin. That night wolves dug up the corpse. Jadwiga went mad. They'd been forced to take her away.

Lately Leopold had gotten himself a new flute. He would play at night by the inn. All the village came and sat on the grass under the stars. They sat and sighed; they didn't rise and dance. Ah, there was no telling the sadness of those tunes! "Only in paradise," thought Sadwinski, "will God permit us to hear again the sadness of those tunes!"

The steep red roofs of Zilnik threw back the noon-day sun. The blacksmith drove through a massive stone gate-tower that had been part of the mediæval wall of the town. He entered an open cobbled square. About its four sides huddled narrow brick houses with quaint projecting gables. Stanislaw remembered the place. As a boy he had often stopped here with his father. A bronze statue of a man on a horse stood in the center of the square. Some prince, his father had told him, of great family. Sadwinski looked up at it reverently. Sight of it raised the heart.

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Satrowski now drew in his big horse so suddenly that his passenger was doubled forward and nearly thrown from the cart. The blacksmith put him down at a corner of the square. He didn't mind giving the old dreamer a lift to the city, but he refused to be burdened with the beggar's belly at the noon hour. Before rattling off he told Sadwinski to meet him here, across from that arch with the clock in it, at five o'clock, and be sharp about it; not a minute later if he wanted to ride.

Satrowski had gone. The sharp clatter of hoofs and rattle of wheels died away. Stanislaw paused, blinking, in the big bright square. He was that boy again, pumping with possibilities, who used to drive into town sitting up proudly on the high seat by his father. Every cobble, every faded brick of the leaning houses, was familiar. Market had been held this morning, but now, nearly noon, only a handful of people remained in the square. Rough booths of wood stood about, a few faded flowers and vegetables still lay out on the boards. A meanly dressed man with a stick and attended by two curs pushed over the refuse that cluttered the cobbles. Scraps of fat and offal, vegetable leaves trodden black, bits of soiled cloth, all the thin litter of the market tempted the stick of the man and the noses of the dogs. Some country people over there were starting home in their lumbering cart. Two young women in full scarlet skirts, with ropes of bright beads hanging over their white chemisettes clambered up beside the man on the high covered seat.

It was many a year since Sadwinski had been to

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Zilnik, but he walked confidently across to the small café in the corner of the square. Well he remembered the obsequious patron who used to bow before his father, before Jozef Sadwinski, head-villager from Lovna. The man would hardly recognize him now, Sadwinski feared, yet he never doubted the patron's respect, once the name of Sadwinski was said in his ear.

A group of peasants stood in front of the café. They were gay with holiday head-handkerchiefs and the flutter of ribbon streamers. The old patron was not about. In his stead was a young thick-headed waiter who glared at Sadwinski with no welcome in his eyes. He flapped his white napkin insolently as if to scare the old starveling away.

Stanislaw felt a weight of loneliness upon him as he walked from the square. He passed through the shade of an antique stone archway with gothic vaulting, down a short, narrow, empty street, and came out into the glare of a broad smooth-paved thoroughfare crowded with people and lined with shops. Confusion struck him in the face from the bewildering whir and noise of the swift passing of vehicles. Roar filled up his head, choked his throat, threatened to clog his heart.

Never in a thousand years could he get used to this throng. People passing, men, women, and children; he wondered there were so many the Russians had not killed. With a feeling of escape he caught sight of the bridge that curved over the river. He remembered how as a boy he had stood looking down at the water, with broad canal-boats gliding lazily along, men dozing

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and fishing. The same forest of slender fish-poles curved out today from the wide stone quai. Stanislaw hurried like an eager boy across the street, across the bridge into the shady peace of a small green park quietly overlooking the river. Damp cool odors filled his nostrils. Water lapped against the wall. Memory flooded the spirit. His heart swelled with happiness. He sat down on a green bench. Sight of clipped grass, beds of scarlet flowers, and bending willows soothed him after the hot bustle of the street.

Stanislaw got up and crunched about on the bordered gravel as he had done as a child. He took pleasure in crossing and recrossing the curved bridge; feeling his body dragged back on the ascent of the incline and shoved forward on the descent. He stood in the sunshine on the peak and looked down at the majestic moving of the river. He strolled back pensively into the shady park and drank water out of the same shallow iron dipper chained to the fountain.

Finally Sadwinski forced himself again into the crowded street. It was necessary to find food, to accomplish his errand. But it was loneliness rather than hunger that tugged at his stomach. He was dazed by the great modern shop-windows, full of clothing and food and boots and books . . . even flowers.

He passed back and forth before the door of a bakery hidden in the gloom of an arcade. There were crisp yellow sticks in there that you could see through the fly-specked window. A man in a soiled white apron was packing crusty bars into an upright hamper. Stanislaw

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smelled the incense of fresh bread. Yet he hardly wanted to eat. Hunger was almost forgotten. A trembling seized him at thought of entering the shop.

He walked on, hunting for the place where his father used to trade. Everything about was changed, as if he had stumbled into an unfamiliar part of the city. A vast building, incredibly high, loomed now in place of the modest wooden structures. Within, a glittering palace for selling sweetmeats; next a crowded tea-shop. The chairs by the little round marble-topped tables on the sawdust-sprinkled sidewalk were filled by city people sipping yellow-brown liquid out of glasses.

Gone were the humble shops Stanislaw used to know. Gone were the shopkeepers who'd have hailed him as son of Sadwinski's. Stanislaw shuffled aimlessly on. He stroked the short prickly gray hairs on his chin. He wiped the sweat from his forehead. His cloak was far too heavy.

It was not such a garment that he planned to buy for his sons. He had in mind to purchase a sheepcoat, such a rough covering as herders use in the hills. He'd seen them hanging outdoors before the shops when he was a boy. Now he saw great glass windows filled with wax figures clothed in long, full-skirted cloaks of rich cloth, belted in at the waist; and soft leather boots that reached to the knee. His money could never be stretched to match such display. For the first time since morning Sadwinski felt poor.

The sky became overcast, the afternoon hot and close.

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People moved endlessly along, listless from humidity. Stench rose from the pavement, the burn of moist heat.

Stanislaw turned down a side street into a poorer quarter. He was hunting for cheaper shops. The heat and odors increased. People were sitting on squalid doorsteps; filth piled in the gutters. The houses seemed to totter; the men had evil eyes. Stanislaw kept his hand in his pocket. Everyone in the city was a thief.

There was something sinister about this place. Open windows leered. That man he passed was a Jew. More and more that he passed were Jews. The wretched houses belched forth Jews. There was a cringing, greasy, alien air about the dark alleys that made Stanislaw sicken with the nostalgia of a lost child. The slant glances of each loiterer seemed to pierce his throat.

Timidity turned to terror. Stanislaw hurried on in spite of the heat. He fled down a narrow street and came out suddenly on the broad open space before a church. One could draw breath. Stanislaw crossed himself. He stood looking up at the towering façade of a gray church softened by weathered tracery. The church of Our Lady of Czenstochowa . . . he had visited it as a boy. He remembered the dimness of its broad aisles, the massive columns, the ancient tombs, and the light of its candles. In the square were benches and a few trees. The place seemed spacious, airy, and calm after the foul crowded alleys of Jewry. Stanislaw's tightened heart loosened. Breath came easily to his lungs.

The clouds had become heavier. A fine rain began to fall. It was going to be a forlorn evening. Stanislaw

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finally found his way back to the meeting-place. Blackened leaves and papers lay about. The cobbles of the market-place were shiny in the wet. The crooked houses seemed to lean heavily on one another. Stanislaw began to look about for Satrowski and his cart. He was eager to get out of this city that had robbed him of his feeling of importance, of his feeling of wealth. There was an ancient clock, faced with faded blue and gold, in the carved stone archway. It said twenty minutes to five. Sadwinski didn't dare go into the café, for fear of missing the blacksmith. He stood waiting on the corner where Satrowski had said he would come.

A long-legged cat was the only other creature alive in the square. It was over by the base of the statue, clawing at a paper box which it flapped desperately about. There had been fish or meat in the box. The animal was famished, and chewed the cardboard because it tasted of food.

Stanislaw was weak from hunger and heat; he was worn in spirit from loneliness and fear. With some of the desperation of the starved cat he waited for the arrival of Satrowski.

Now from the broad street outside the square came the sound of music. Sadwinski hurried over to the side of the market-place where the alley led through the arch. Here he stood. He could look toward the street and at the same time keep an eye on the rendezvous in the square.

The music was coming nearer. It swelled and swelled. Nearer and nearer came that wonder of sound, louder

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and louder. The people down there at the corner stopped and turned. Stanislaw pushed forward through the vaulted archway that led out of the square.

As he reached the wide street a military funeral came into view; slowly, with muffled beating. Sadwinski was pushed along in the increasing crowd. Everyone pressed to the curb. They stood still and looked, craning their necks. Sadwinski could feel the hot breath of those near him, smell the odor of warm bodies and wet cloth. A woman with a dripping umbrella jostled him. The man next to him stood with his hands in his pockets, his neck huddled into the upturned collar of his blouse.

Music. It caught and held; it sucked at your spirit. It seemed to soothe and yet to tear and rend. It came on like a company of angels that dragged their feet.

The band marched ahead of the horses. On a gun-carriage lay a coffin draped with a flag. Soldiers on horses paced behind. Nearer and nearer came the cortege. The band yearned and yearned. Its vibrations woke to ecstasy yet plunged the heart to grief.

Tears rose like blood and burst out hot in Sadwinski's eyes. The flags, the flowers, the slow pacing, and that music of melting tears.

Sadwinski pushed to the curb. He stood, his head bent. Never had emotion so flowed and mounted through him as at the wail of that military band. There was a cord bound tight round his heart that would never come off. There was a pressure in his throat that was yet sweet and pleasant. The dirge thumped in his

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ears. He was stirred. His soul was turned over. He became drunk with emotion.

Sadder than the wind in the forest, sadder than the nightingale at the edge of the wood, sadder than the notes of Leopold's flute! Tears streamed from Sadwinski's eyes, they rolled down his colorless face, past his thin lips, and fell on the front of his worn cloak that was caught about his skeleton body by a rope. He was weeping, he was happy, his starved spirit was full. Ah, he would not, if he could, have done with tears!

A grasp on his arm. Stanislaw turned, and at the same time wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. As his sight cleared he looked straight into the face of the man with his collar turned up who stood next him. The fellow was as old as Stanislaw and quite as shabby. His eyes were bloodshot. He stood bareheaded in the rain, his cap in his hand. A black, workman's blouse clung wet to his shoulders. He was shaking with sobs and reached out toward Sadwinski with hands that hungered and groped. Soon the two were locked in an embrace of sympathy. No word was necessary, but wet cheek to wet cheek they swayed with mute and mutual feeling; passion ten times sweeter for being shared.

Never had Stanislaw felt himself so fulfilled, so completed by any mortal as by this silent sharer of understanding whose face he could not distinctly see because of tears. His eyes were dim but he felt the clutch of his companion's arms, he felt emotion pulsing through that poor body. He knew that pouring through his soul

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was the same sweet rapture of grief that the music was pouring through his own.

For a moment they loosened and stood back. Then by common impulse they again threw their arms around each other and buried their chins. They clung sobbing, Stanislaw Sadwinski and this stranger, a stranger no longer. They clasped and clung with their hands, they yearned and strained with their arms.

The funeral procession passed slowly along. The walk of horses is slow. The band throbbed and groaned. Every one stood silent in the rain with head uncovered. They crossed themselves. Over them fell the heart-piercing moans of the "*Marche Funèbre*." Ah, God, what a feeling! Sadwinski's cheeks were running with tears.

The rain continued to drizzle. Slowly the funeral train disappeared down the long street, its horses, its banners, and its plumes. Only the roll of the drums floated back to wave in the ear. People sighed as they turned to pass on their way. But the two men embracing on the sidewalk's edge, locked by mutual sympathy, continued to sway and rock themselves back and forth.

Sadwinski lifted his eyes. There was the smell of warm sweat and rain about the neck of his friend. His clothes equaled Stanislaw's (they could not surpass them) in shabbiness. His skin was red like scraped flesh, his face sharp like a weasel's, a slanting chin and forehead sloped to a pointed nose. But all this was made beautiful to Stanislaw by that silent bond which drew their hearts

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together. He was too drunk with emotion, his eyes too blinded by tears, to see his friend clearly, nor did he wish to see, only to experience the sameness of soul that quivered through the clutching of their arms.

The crowd had thinned away, the music stilled. The rain fell in a cold thin drizzle. After a pat on Sadwinski's back, his friend vanished. Nor would Sadwinski have detained him. Like a true artist in emotion he knew the climax, the time to ring down the curtain.

The man had gone, but he had left warmth and fellowship behind, living on in the heart; such as the whole city with its wealth and greatness had not given.

Stanislaw walked back to the meeting-place in the market square. It was growing late; he could see by the clock over the arch that it was just past five, the hour when the blacksmith was to pick him up. He hung round the square. Satrowski, he thought, would be unwilling to go home without him. He might be in the city looking for him now. He'd come back here soon, anxious, to the rendezvous.

Not so Satrowski. He'd spent little enough time waiting for his passenger; less time worrying about him. He'd set off for home with his restless horse a half hour ago.

As darkness began to close in in earnest, the early darkness brought on by rain, Sadwinski struck out for home, going south along the cobbled street that merged into the country road. The ruts were full of liquid mud. Sadwinski's old boots squelched through muck. Rain

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dribbled in his face. It soon became impossible to see fences and trees. Rain shut out the sky and fields. Even the crosses and shrine had melted into the night.

Yet there was warmth in Sadwinski's soul like vodka. His soul burned. There was the smell of human warmth in his nose, the feel of that poor man's weight as he had leaned in his arms. There was a light in Sadwinski's soul like that that burns a candle before a shrine.

Stanislaw Sadwinski plodded on, a man in whose heart were tender sobs, in whose throat was the sweet taste of tears, in whose ears the murmur of music lingered like the scent of flowers.

It should have been a moonlight night; through the mist and drizzle stole a soft pervading glimmer, like memory of some moonlight long ago. The darkness of the clouds and rain could not quite cancel the bright diffusion of the sky.

Sadwinski walked back over the nine versts to Lovna. He kept his hand in the pocket of his cloak. His spirit was still lifted, his heart full of the soaring moan of the band. Loneliness had melted away in music. Timidity had been drawn away on that mounting, rising, pulsing harmony of sound.

Loneliness was gone, timidity was gone. Stanislaw could not say afterward at what moment he woke up to the realization that his money was gone. His pocket was empty except for his hand. This fact did not fall suddenly on his mind, like a blow, causing his feet to pause, his heart to stop beating. Instead consciousness of his

loss seemed to permeate gradually through his brain as damp strikes into the body.

His money was gone. During that impassioned embrace in the street of Zilnik the beggar's swift fingers had found their way into Sadwinski's pocket. It was almost less difficult to realize that the money was gone than to believe now that it had ever been there.

Once at home, Sadwinski groped his way to the stove and lighted a fire. He stood watching the struggle of the weak flame against the twigs. Even after the twigs were lighted the fire had difficulty in lifting a thick blanket of smoke against the heavy downward pressure of dampness.

Stanislaw remembered that he had not eaten all day. With warmth from the fire and strength given him by food the numbness of his mind disappeared. He sat down and leaned his head back against the side of the barn. His stomach was warm with food. His wet feet stretched toward the stove. Gradually his brain cleared of fatigue. He began to realize his loss, to suffer horribly from the loss of his money; not sharply as from a stab, but with a closing weight of misery that seemed to press on his body as well as his mind.

Hate toward the man who had robbed him poisoned Sadwinski's soul. A curse swelled to his lips. He longed to push out his tongue in a curse. Only fear for his own safety, only dread of how the curse might rebound, kept him from uttering the hate that burned in his heart. He lacked courage to speak out his hate. He was

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afraid, and like a coward he could only rock and whimper and groan.

Yet toward morning he dozed, his mouth open, his head nodding back against the wall. And after his head had nodded back for the last time, he slept. Sleep settled like a dark cloud that capped and pressed; like a memory that could not be pushed from the brain.

Chapter Four

WHEN Sadwinski woke up in the gray light of morning, he could not believe at first, even with his hand in his pocket, that his money was gone. Again and again he groped for it, rubbing his stiff fingers against the palm of his empty hand.

He gulped down bitterness with his breakfast. He shuffled across the barn, through the band of pale light from the high window, and took Julka her food.

Later he went out in the sun, down the village street to sit all morning by the new church and mope by its walls.

On the way he met Stan Satrowski in his high cart, driving his unruly horse. The blacksmith passed with only a leer; without so much as pausing to ask how Stanislaw got home last night; without so much as shouting that he was sorry to come off without him. This neglect, this passing him as though he were a dog, lashed deep into Sadwinski's pride.

The walls of the new church were rising where the old ones had stood, to the left of the road, beyond the

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inn. Stanislaw's feet turned in of themselves through the white gate, into the fenced yard, and passed down the steps between the unfinished walls.

Leo Koszinski, he who was hit in the leg, was working alone, using a flat trowel and slapping mortar between bricks. He was the son of the present innkeeper, grandson to that Peter who twice robbed Jozef Sadwinski by lawsuit.

During his life Jozef Sadwinski had suffered three times from the law. At one time he'd been made to pay one hundred and thirty rubles to Jan Karniki, that murderer, that dog's brother. Also in the year he died he had quarreled a second time with Peter Koszinski, the old innkeeper, over the boundaries of their lands. Sadwinski had forced Peter into court, but Sadwinski himself had had to pay three hundred rubles before he got out. He had offered the cup of the lawsuit, but he had been forced to drink of the poison himself.

Leo now moved awkwardly about, throwing out with his hands his leg that had been wounded. The knee was too stiff to move by itself.

Stanislaw paused politely to greet him. "May Jesus Christ be praised," he said, gently.

Leo bent over his work. He replied only curtly.

"They've got a great church in America," volunteered Stanislaw, expansively, swelling out his chest and trying to make his weak voice pompous. "A very great church. They say at night it towers to the stars. That is why God blesses them in America." Stanislaw spoke

out with authority. Had he not a sister in that opulent land?

Koszinski grinned cynically without looking up. He crooked his sweaty elbow and wiped his big mouth with his wrist. He made no reply.

"Ah, when the church is finished," sighed Stanislaw, "when we have again the church of Our Lady, then God will come back to this land."

Leo bent over. He slapped on mortar. His shoulder was humped toward Sadwinski. He had no time to gossip with an old fool.

Stanislaw turned away, bruised by this insult. Before he reached the fence he met one of the Dubak boys strolling in. Leo promptly put down his trowel, leaned back against the wall, folded his arms, greeted his assistant, and summoned plenty of leisure.

Stanislaw squatted miserably by the fence, trying to dry out his old bones in the sun. Neither Koszinski nor young Dubak paid any attention to him. He might have been an old toad waiting by a stone. They joked coarsely about the Sulewska girl, they whistled over their work, and Leo awkwardly flung out his leg.

Hurt ached in Sadwinski's mind from the slights of others. "Our family is humbled," he thought, bitterly. "The name of our family lies in the dust. It's God's mercy our father, Jozef Sadwinski, did not survive to this day."

Stanislaw, sitting there by the half-built wall of the church, brooding in the sun, thought of his father, of Jozef Sadwinski. He had been a great benefactor of the

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old church, yet now in this new edifice his name was forgotten, his memory no longer considered.

Stanislaw's thoughts so wrought upon his desires that tears began filling his eyes. As always when in distress, he thought of Jozefa, of his sister in America. She had, in a way, deserted him, yet he was still faithful to her in his thoughts. Now he resolved to write her. He would no longer be silent. He would make clear to Jozefa this new need that pressed.

"My sister," he would write, "they are rebuilding the church.

"Send me at once 500 zlotys. Do not wonder that I write so. I mention the one honor that can possibly remain to me. I long to hear the name of our family listed among the donors."

This letter, like all the others planned, was never written, but Stanislaw gained a feeling of importance from its planning. He was day-dreaming, and as he dreamed the clouds in his brain took fire. It seemed to him as if the letter to Jozefa were already written, as if it were already sent, as if the answer were already here. It seemed as if his pocket were no longer empty, as if, instead of being robbed of the worth of forty rubles, instead of having had his pocket picked, he'd become possessed of five hundred zlotys. It was always so beautiful what passed in dreams!

At noon Stanislaw started homeward. His boots had dried and stiffened on his feet, but by the time he'd struggled up the long slope to the door, they had softened and yielded to the muscles. His sluggish circula-

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tion was stirred by the exercise and the sun. Through cracks in the side of the barn came out odors. Jan and Stefan were preparing dinner, frying meat. Cousin Jacimba must have sent in some of the poorer parts of the veal.

After eating heartily Stanislaw walked across the barn to where Julka lay, her body a senseless black lump in the gloom. Only the shadows under two cheek bones seemed to lie on the pillow.

It was thus, while viewing the misery of another, that philosophy first returned to limber the stiffened mind of Sadwinski. "Rubles come, rubles go," he mused, thinking of the great loss he had suffered. Poor Julka, she couldn't get up even with the strength given her by a good broth. She had no dress, no apron, no kerchief, no shawl, no shoes to put on.

Afterward as Stanislaw dreamed away the afternoon by the burned-out fire, he was ready to regard his embraces yesterday with the beggar with some of the philosophy of a drunkard. He thought of those moments of exquisite companionship on the wet street of Zilnik. He was a drunkard reliving his last spree and agreeing with himself that he must pay the price. And even at that price, at the price of forty rubles, it was worth it.

By the time it was necessary to rebuild the fire Stanislaw was thinking with satisfaction: "Forty rubles! A fortune! In just one pocket. What a man of affairs, what a man of importance, what a man of riches that poor beggar must have thought I was!"

Part III: Homebrew

Chapter One

IT WAS on Thursday, the 2nd of June, the very day after the purchase of the proud house in Lawyer Kilpatrick's office, that the family Zalinski moved away forever from that mean shelter on the land of the Pest-wickis where they had lived untidily for thirteen years.

Tony Kublic came early with the delivery auto of Wobblenski to help with the moving. Today was fair, yet it had rained during the night and patches of bare ground round house-doors were wet and slippery. The three men, old Michael, Adam, and Tony, had some difficulty in lifting the stove. When they reached the proud house and were unloading, old Michael's foot slipped. He let go his hold. The stove fell. It struck Adam to the ground, crushing his pelvis. After that he lived only one day. It was thus that Death came, the first guest, to the proud house.

A week passed after the funeral before Jozefa could compose her mind to write the necessary mourning letter to her brother, to Stanislaw Sadwinski, in Poland.

"I send you this cry out of my soul," Jozefa wrote in Polish. "Adam is dead.

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"Last week my man, Adam Zalinski, was killed by the stove.

"At first he was not quite dead. He groaned and moved a little. We sent for Father O'Keefe. In the end we were even forced to call a physician.

"We have a great sorrow, Adam is no longer of this life, yet we have this proud house. I am able to nourish my family well with these rooms. There are in all eight rooms in this house. They provide well for the breath in our bodies.

"I take in twelve roomers beside old Michael. They work for the Western Valley Onion Company. Old Michael pays nothing. Can I grudge shelter to the father of my man?"

In July of this same year, Jozefa wrote to her brother again.

"Now am I forced to write evil," she said in this letter. "I am forced to inform you how the Pestwickis are dogs. They are so evil no bird will rest on their roof. They devote themselves only to liquor. They drink and carouse. Their house next to ours is a pigsty. It is not to be wondered at that we get nothing from them but meanness.

"The girls are forced out to work. Hela Pestwicka (in whose heart the devil finds room) worked in onions. She was forced to kneel, to weed on the ground.

"Now the telling sticks like a bone in the throat. When Adam is no longer of the living, Michael, the old rogue, becomes for us the ruin of our home.

"Michael Zalinski has married Hela Pestwicka.

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"The wedding was celebrated in the church in Milesbrough, at nine o'clock in the morning, on July 7th. Three times the banns were posted. I walked to Milesbrough. I tore them down from the wall of the church.

"Hela bewitched him. He is old and feeble. His sight is dim. He was unable to see the ugliness in her eyes. He wanted something warm in his bed. He even took her without dowry . . . the dunce!

"This Hela, this Pestwicka, has she a feeling of love for her husband? You can judge. Even now after the wedding she continues her habits with other men.

"Now I am forced to inform you how this 'Madam' assumes for herself to live in my house. She plans to get her living out of me. She claims this house belongs to old Michael. She has drawn from his babble how the deed stands in his name. Old Michael who put in only 100, and we who put into it the whole of that great fortune, 2200 dollars of the work of our hands!"

On the 12th of August, hardly more than a month after the wedding-day of Michael Zalinski and Hela Pestwicka, Jozefa wrote again to her brother:

"This will inform you of old Michael Zalinski. We found him dead in his bed where he lay. This provides little grief. He had grown peevish. It was on August 4th that he died. He had lived for 82 years. How could a man so old safeguard himself against a witch? Hela Pestwicka poisoned the old man. She names herself Hela Zalinska. Never could I name that name upon my lips. It would choke me in the throat.

"The police failed to find out the poison in old

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Michael. He was sick and vomited before he died. They failed to shut up the Pestwicka in that prison that she deserved.

"The Pestwickis regard this house with envy. They have awaited only the death of old Michael.

"Even before the funeral the whole litter fell upon us like fleas. Our pig vanished from the shed. Thus they robbed us in our own house.

"Now they threaten to put us out of our house. They claim it for Hela. They say it is hers by inheritance. She gets it from her man.

"Dear brother: Advise me how to act in this matter. I am old. I am alone. I am broken. I am sick with all this worry.

"Dear brother: I beg you to write. If only this once. I beg. I urge. Help me with words in this matter . . ."

Chapter Two

IT WAS the last day of August. It was evening, and Jozefa was writing to her brother. She sat huddled over the rickety table in the one room of the mean hut that stood next the Staszkos'. It was a tumble-down place. It smelled musty. It was poorly lighted by one smoky kerosene lamp.

Two weeks before, Jozefa Zalinska and her four children had been ejected; locked out of the proud house by the Pestwickis.

"Those thieves have stripped us," wailed Jozefa in her letter. "They have forced us to walk uncovered. They have left us to hunger and cold.

"We have found this poor shelter, no better than a pigsty, a mean hut in this low part of town. It belongs to Jawuski. It is too mean for them to live in. It stands between the cabin of the Jawuskis and the cabin of the Staszkos, south of Wobblenski's store. The rent costs 2 dollars. Jan is away in Chicopee-Mass, to work in the mill. I pay Stella. She says it is nothing. Ah, that rent that is nothing, how it presses me down like a stone!

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"Now I am unable to shelter one roomer. It is a house of one room and a roof that leaks water. It sets by the hill below Mary Kublic's. There is scarce enough land to nourish milk in one cow.

"Now Michalina pouts and grieves. She is proud like our father, like Jozef Sadwinski. Yet she is forced to go each day to Milesbrough into the laundry and work. She earns only what she wears on her back.

"Soon Jamie and Richard will not be permitted to work. They will be forced to go to the school. All this is great cost. And what comes of it? They scorn Polish. They are proud of their America.

"Ah, my brother, how am I able to give Jamie and Richard the school? They will be unable to go to school because of shoes. In America one cannot learn without shoes.

"It is a land costly; a land cruel to those who are poor.

"Dear brother: How to write further? I cry to God in my misery. I am sick in my back, yet I am forced to hire myself out in the fields, to bend like a servant for others, to screen and sack onions. I work for the Western Valley Onion Company. Sacking calls for the work of an ox rather than the strength of a woman. My back is broken a hundred times. I am without strength to work further.

"Hela Pestwicka boasts of her proud house. She names it 'Pleasant Manor.' She sits by her window high up. She watches when I come from the fields. She looks down upon me with a mean smile. She presses me under

her feet. Malice gleams from her evil eyes. She regards my hardships with pleasure. Only this terrible need, only the hunger of these little ones, could force me to pass that house on the road.

"Tony works for Stanley Wobblenski on the delivery auto. At night he smokes by our lamp. He urges me to go to Milesbrough, to the court, to inform the judge of my wrongs.

"Tony says he can get me a lawyer. He urges that I drag the Pestwicka into court. (I regret my character forbids me to spit in her face.) He says the judge will force her to pay me back my proud house.

"Dear brother: Vengeance cannot be procured without cost. It will be necessary to pay the judge and the lawyer. Do not think because I live here in America that I am rich, that I carry gold about me in sacks. It is now 13 years that I have been in this Vermont. I have only the 60 dollars that I brought with me from Poland, and the 100 dollars that my man, Adam Zalinski, willed me in the bank together with the cow. God's will be done!

"Do not trouble to inform me that the court is a poor place in which to find justice. Our father, Jozef Sadwinski, was thrice defeated by the lawsuit. Avoid the lawsuit, he warned, as you would avoid the tomb.

"Shall I, then, who have nothing, risk in the lawsuit the little I have?

"Moreover, anger will grow big in the Pestwicka because I drag her into court, because I cause her heavy

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costs. She will consider evil. She will pour out curses upon me on the day I drag her into court.

"And you know the ways of a curse. Whatever curse is cursed, and whatever evil is spoken, there is no escape from it whatever possible short of God's miracle.

"Shall I disobey our father's instructions? Shall I call down the curse of Hela in the court? Yet how drive from the heart the hope for that house up the river that is mine?

"Dear brother: I see but one way before me out of my wrongs. I see but one pathway out of my grief. I will throw myself upon Wobblenski; surely he will aid me in my misfortune. He is rich. He is the son to comfort my old age. His roof is the roof to shelter me.

"Dear brother: I go to bend my face before Wobblenski. But I have little hope in my heart. The Slambowska has no desire to lose her place. She will use lies against me. Also, Hela, that evil one, she has Wobblenski in her eye. She calls to him continually to come in and sit in her house. She forces him to drink homebrew. She plans to marry his riches if she is able."

Chapter Three

THURSDAY, September 22, 1927; day of sorrow yet of relief!

Jozefa was up with the sun. Stanley Wobblenski would be at her door at seven in his fordcar. One did not keep Stanley Wobblenski waiting. In his fordcar on that day had he not agreed to take Michalina and little Katherine on a free ride to Chicopee-Mass?

It was a long way to Chicopee-Mass. One day would hardly suffice for the journey. Stanley would linger two nights in the city to accomplish his errand. He planned to ask John Pietrowski to give him his sister Mary in marriage. Stanley had never seen Mary Pietrowska, but he had heard good things of her thrift and strength. On Saturday, day after tomorrow, Stan would return. But, alas! he would return alone, without either little Katherine or Michalina!

He planned to leave the two girls with his sister, Stella Wobblenska, now Sister Theresa, in the convent near Chicopee-Mass. Sister Theresa had sent him a letter. In that letter she had consented that Katherine

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enter the convent school. Michalina might also enter the convent, the letter said, as lay sister, and help in the kitchen until such time as our Blessed Mother should arouse desire in her heart to abandon the world altogether.

It was Wobblenski who had devised this economic relief for Jozefa. His plan would free her of two mouths to fill daily and hand them over to the bounty of Our Lady.

On the first day of September Jozefa had consulted Wobblenski about the lawsuit. She had questioned him in regard to the wisdom of dragging the Pestwicka into court, all the while secretly hoping that as an alternative Wobblenski would offer shelter to her and her children. Stan had vigorously discouraged the lawsuit, but at the same time he had failed to urge Jozefa and her family into his home.

He had, however, written to Sister Theresa and made the plan to place the girls, Michalina and Katherine, where they would no longer burden their mother.

Jozefa now wailed forth her despair at the parting as she stood by the table next to the hot stove in the one room of the dingy hut, packing up cold boiled potatoes and pork in a paper bag for the journey.

Never again to see the beauty of Michalina, pride of her eyes! Never again to feel the caresses of little Katherine, child of her heart! Grief spilled from Jozefa's eyes. Never again to be forced to provide potatoes and pork for their growing mouths. Relief welled in alternate waves with despair.

HOME BREW

Little Katherine ran into the hut and threw herself into her mother's arms. She smothered sobs of terror on her mother's sweaty breast. The child's sharp black eyes were dulled, her nose red, her pigtail of straight dark hair limp, the blue dress over her thin body rumpled, the soiled cotton handkerchief in her hot hand pulpy from woe. She looked out of the window and felt new terror of her stocky, drab brother-in-law, the surly and unsmiling Wobblenski. She felt terror at thought of riding with him in the bumpy fordcar, at thought of the unfamiliar whirl and noise that awaited them in the streets of Chicopee-Mass, at thought of the silent sisters gliding about, robed in dismal black.

In the open doorway Michalina poised herself lightly. She was dry-eyed and self-possessed. She had always wanted to go to Chicopee-Mass. There were movies there, a five-and-ten, streets that glittered at night, soda-water, and people passing. It was a place bigger and gayer than Milesbrough. Anastasia Gutfinska, who had been there, perpetually sung its delights. When Adam was alive Michalina had often begged her father to take her to the city, but he had opposed it. He would shrug his shoulders coldly. "You buy stockings," he would say in English, "waste money."

Michalina now skipped out to the road. She had on a short green flannel skirt and a bright green slip-on that set off, like the calyx of a lily, the pretty poise of her head, the gleam of her yellow hair. She swung herself into the front seat of the fordcar beside Stanley. She moved as light as the mist, she was cool and fresh

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as the morning. She was quite sure of herself and her charm. She kissed the ends of her pink fingers to Tony Kublic who stood by the side of the road, leaning on his dusty bicycle and watching, dumb, incredulous, the preparations for Michalina's permanent removal to Chicopee-Mass.

Heaven was sullen. The air was heavy and damp, the sun without heart to struggle above the mist, to fire the maples and dry out the earth. By the roadside were spikes of dried goldenrod crested with cobweb; over the little blue asters, clear-eyed above their dusty leaves, lay a sprinkling of tiny moist globules. The dust of the road was still crusted wet and brown by the dew.

For a moment the fordcar hovered and buzzed, it purred and rasped, then it shot forward with a sudden jerk, rattling its rusty iron and slapping its side-curtains in the face of the air. Its tires left a broad print through the damp brown crust and into the gray dust of the road.

Jozefa stood by the door, wiping her eyes with her big gnarled hand. She forgot about the relief, the two less mouths to feed. She forgot what Wobblenski had said about saving her money. She forgot the bruises from Michalina's tongue; Michalina always claiming that the food at home was no good, couldn't touch the eats at the self-serve in Milesbrough. All this went out of Jozefa's mind as the fordcar became hidden by the turn in the road, as its rattle passed from her ears. She turned back into the hut. In the heart of Jozefa Zalinska was only immense open loneliness.

HOMEBREW

Within the house Jozefa looked about for two spiky blond heads, two pairs of soiled khaki pants, the four sprawling bare legs of Jamie and Richard.

Jamie and Richard had vanished. They had stolen away by the back door, out of the narrow yard. Jozefa called. To call was vain. Not even Jeddy answered. All was quiet and empty. Jamie and Richard were gone, they had vanished, they were as if they had never been.

The louts! The sons of laziness! Not even the cow tied out to grass! Where had the boys fled? Fishing, no doubt, or playing on the logs in the river with the Jawuski boys whose father was away working in the mill in Chicopee-Mass, so that their mother could not control what they did.

It was now the third week in September, yet Jozefa was unable to give Jamie and Richard the school. The boys lacked shoes, also it was necessary for them to work toward their support by helping harvest onions in the fields.

Only two days ago Jozefa had been kept from work and lost a half-day's pay. She had been taken to Milesbrough before the judge. She had been fined for the boys' truancy, and there had been taken from her such money as she had already managed to save toward shoes in order to enable Jamie and Richard to go to the school.

Jozefa now went about tying out the cow. She wrapped up some cold boiled potatoes for her dinner, in a newspaper, and put it under her arm. She shut the doors of the hut and started slowly north along the road through the village toward the onion fields, a deep ma-

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ternal anxiety in her heart. When you say you do not know where a boy is, that is to say that you know he's in mischief. Jamie and Richard, ah, they would drown! The river was a beast not to be trusted. And where was the money they ought to be earning, money for those shoes of great cost? Ah, those boys, how they hated to work in the fields!

By mid-afternoon the sullenness of heaven turned to dark, heavy anger. Jozefa had to hurry home early, blown before whirling leaves and drops of rain. Her big body swung along the dusty road, back toward the village. Gusts of wind snarled about her; they raised up spirals of dust that powdered her solemn brown face, greasy with sweat and lined with anxiety, under the flapping white headsquare.

A clump of scraggy locust trees at the edge of the village was being lashed by the first blasts of the storm. Now Jozefa must pass by the proud house, basely stolen from her by those thieves. Close your eyes, Josefa, stumble blindly along, drag your feet through the thick sand of the road as well as may be without seeing. Is it not better to risk falling and bruising the body from lack of eyes, than to bruise the soul with a bitter sight?

Jozefa stumbles on with closed eyes. She refuses to see the stolen house of the Pestwickis. Suddenly she plunges headforemost into a small uncovered roadside stand made of boards and boxes, erected since morning in front of the Pestwickis'. Her toes strike sharply against the boxes, her hands slap abruptly down on the boards, sending a rude jolt through her body.

Jozefa's eyes snap open. She has run into a counter by the roadside for selling vegetables. Jamie and Richard are there. They sit looking up at her with surprise equal to her own; there is astonishment and cupidity in the brown eyes of the one, the blue eyes of the other.

The boys are seated on boxes placed under the group of thin locusts before the hen-scratched front dooryard of the proud house. Their knees are hidden under the counter of rough boards. Jeddy sits watching them intently, his head on one side, his brown eyes quizzical. Vegetables lie out on the boards: tightly balled red cabbages, dark lumpy squashes, plump pumpkins of clear orange next to bunches of plumed carrots and the tough red-lined leaves of over-grown beets.

This road, a country road twisting north along the river from Harry's Mill, was used only by Polish onion-packers going to and from the fields. Surely Jamie and Richard could never make money enough to repay them for the time slept away sitting there, lazy sons of laziness! Ah, it was such lessons of idleness that one learned in those schools of America! Whose vegetables did they pretend to sell, sitting there like two little Jews? Where would any customers come from? How could they humble the pride to sit there? What humiliation, under the sneering eyes of that house of thieves! On the land of the Pestwickis! It was a wonder old Peter Pestwicki allowed the sons of an enemy thus to play games on his land. It was a deep wonder to Jozefa that her erring sons had not been kicked from the yard.

With angry words she herded the startled boys home.

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She battered them with her big hands as ruthlessly as the storm battered the trees. She fell to and cuffed them till their ears were as sore as her pride. Jeddy slunk at their heels, crushed, yet thinking it honor to even share their disgrace.

Jamie turned and walked backward in front of his mother. To placate her he offered her their earnings. Two dollars! And for only one day! Holiest saints! More than the boys could have earned in the fields! Jozefa was stunned. Who in Harry's Mill paid such money for vegetables that one was obliged to cast out from the cellar in summer to make room for the new?

"Two fellers come out from Milesbrough in a Panhard," explained Jamie, still walking backward in front of Jozefa's feet. "They pay big money."

From Milesbrough! God's Mother! Jozefa stumbled, faint from surprise. Would the strangeness of life never stop whirling her head?

Yes, (Jamie and Richard explained in unison and at length, after they'd reached home) two men had come out from Milesbrough that morning in a shiny car. They'd paid a great deal of money for the vegetables they'd bought. To be sure, Peter Pestwicki had pocketed the money, the venture in roadside selling being his, but he'd generously handed back to Jamie and Richard a dollar apiece for keeping shop for one day.

Angry jealousy flared up in Jozefa against her enemies. If the men from Milesbrough in the rich car wanted cabbages for big money, she would forestall the Pestwickis, she would sell to them first before the peo-

HOMEBREW

ple in their beautiful cars reached the home of the thieves.

By next morning the storm had drenched and passed. Jozefa had Jamie and Richard carry out boxes and two discarded doors onto the narrow strip of wet leaf-covered grass between the shanty and the road. Here they erected a roadside stand of their own, a rival to the road stand of the Pestwickis; and thereon arranged cabbages, with a few pinched turnips dragged from the garden too soon.

Jamie and Richard and Jeddy danced in the morning mist about this altar to economy. They were entranced by the new venture. The boys were more than willing to help their mother reap the entire profit of each sale instead of having to hand over the intake to old Peter and receive back from him only their wages in cash.

The day was fresh and fair, the earth newly washed; over it God's Mother had laid her blue mantle, fringed deep with gold sun on its edge. There was a light stir of air, a tender breeze, like a kiss of the little Lord Jesus laid on each cheek. Jozefa swung off to the onion lands, some of this lightness and freshness within her. For the last time she'd bend in the fields of another. What dreams of relief and reunion refreshed! Had Jamie and Richard not spoken of fabulous prices paid by two visitors in a shining car? Why had it never occurred to Jozefa before to sit by the roadside and turn such common things as cabbages and carrots into gold? One of the men yesterday had paid ten dollars for a pumpkin rotted in a spot. The other had given a like

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amount for a purple cabbage which he'd picked up laughing from the counter. Ah, America, it was a land of toil and grief. Also it was a land of startling surprises. If the immense profits of this new venture came true, as Jamie assured her they would, she would no longer be forced to work as the slave of another. At the end of one week she'd be rich. Then she would fall on her knees to Wobblenski. She would kiss his hands. She would implore him to return to Chicopee; bring little Katherine and Michalina back to her arms.

But Chicopee-Mass was a long way, a vast journey, almost to Lovna. Would she ever be able to prevail upon Stanley to go? Or were the two girls lost to her forever?

This discovery of new wealth, this new way of finding a living, oh, why had it not disclosed itself in time, before she had severed from her little Katherine and Michalina?

Chapter Four

JOZEFA hurried home at the end of the September day. Intense rays from the falling sun slanted through the red roof of the maples. Her feet skimmed a thin carpet of gold. The day was cold at sunset; the thick odor of smoke, the tang of fall in the air. Jozefa forgot that her back ached, that her muscles were tired. Ten dollars for a single red cabbage! And she had left no less than six for Jamie and Richard to sell. Was there a fortune made? She felt such an uplift of hope. Surely she would be able to beg or bribe Wobblenski to go to Chicopee and bring the girls back. The bright vision of a rich, united family dazzled Jozefa's brain. Already she felt about her neck the vise of little Katherine's thin arms.

Jozefa's feet stopped abruptly.

Wobblenski! He had come home! It was only Friday. It was twenty-four hours ahead of his promised return. Yet he had come, for there was the fordcar itself, looking tired and dusty in the fading light as it tipped dejectedly toward the gutter before Jozefa's door. Wob-

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blenski was climbing out, and Jeddy was stalking loyally about the auto, waving his plumed tail. The first barking enthusiasm of his welcome had subsided, but he was still stiff with pride as he called upon the universe to behold how the family was related to a fordcar. And there, saints in Heaven! was Michalina. Michalina herself, back by some magic and by some magic transformed. A red-silk dress and gold earrings! Like a bride, like a bird as she hopped from the car!

Michalina advanced through the smoky evening haze. She was smiling, yet cool, as she embraced her mother. "Now don't go and throw a fit, ma," she responded to the astonishment on Jozefa's face. "I never said I was going to stay. What I was looking for was a day's shopping. Stan? Naw, he didn't land his Pietrowska. She's getting herself hitched to some other feller. Sure, Kay's staying all right." Michalina stood in the half-light on the leaf-strewn road, complacently adjusting her finely pleated scarlet skirt about her slender hips.

Michalina had come back . . . without Jozefa's sending. God was protecting them. Jozefa hurried eagerly to the wayside counter to see if under the care of Jamie and Richard it glittered with gold. She must detain Stanley. She must display to him their good fortune. She must make glad the eyes of Michalina. If only little Katherine . . .

The faded vegetables seemed asleep. Jamie and Richard were not there.

Jamie and Richard. Eventually, with the aid of Jeddy, the boys were found hiding under the slope of the

hill, in the dusk, in the cramped back yard, behind the cowshed, near a pile of manure. They were sullen. They were smeared with dried tears. They refused to lift up their chins. Wobblenski hauled Jamie roughly to his feet by one arm. Jamie slumped back again, a miserable, spineless ball, onto the heap of manure.

Finally with kicks and curses from Wobblenski the boy was made to mumble out his story. Two strange men had stopped at the vegetable stand that afternoon; the first customers to appear. They had handled over the wares. Then one of them had asked if this was "Pestwicki's place?" "Sure," the other had interrupted. "'Roadside stand with two kids out front' is the sign."

"Hand out your stuff, kid," the first man had said, showing Jamie a ten-dollar bill.

Richard's hands had trembled violently as he handed up a cabbage. The eyes of both boys, Richard's blue and Jamie's brown, had been distended by the magic green-and-white glitter of that ten-dollar bill. No hopes were too great. It would mean movies in Milesbrough, candy, soda, chewing-gum from Wobblenski's store. A real gun, a ride in an airplane, perhaps. The two boys had felt already their mother's pleased approval of their business ability. They had wriggled with the warmth that pervaded their insides.

Then the owner of the ten-dollar bill had merely tossed the cabbage up and down in one hand and, with the other extended, had demanded "cold tea." "Come acrost with your cold tea, kid," he'd said with assurance.

Jamie had sat shaking his head and growing sick at

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his stomach. He didn't have any cold tea. When the man understood this he'd given a snarl and pitched the cabbage angrily into the road. Then the two men had driven off toward Pestwicki's. They had taken off the ten-dollar bill. They hadn't even paid for the cabbage.

Jamie, jerked on his feet, stood before the tribunal of his mother, Michalina, and Wobblenski. The boy had concluded his recital of the day's events, and now he spoke up bravely. "You see, we gotta get us some cold tea, ma," he said. "Like Pestwicki done. What them fellers is after is cold tea."

Jamie went on to explain. At Pestwicki's yesterday they had been supplied by old Peter with several bottles of brown liquid which were stowed away under the counter. The boys were cautioned to hand these out only in case "cold tea" was expressly asked for. The men in the shiny Panhard, after buying the pumpkin and cabbage and paying in princely fashion, had indeed demanded cold tea, but they had seemed to expect to pay nothing additional for it. For this reason the boys, although overwhelmed by the immense price paid for the vegetables, had attached no importance to the transaction of the cold tea.

It was partly on this account that they'd omitted to mention it to their mother, and partly because old Peter Pestwicki, when he hired them to keep shop, had cautioned them that the keeping of their job, if not the very wholeness of their skins, depended on their remaining silent in regard to the cold tea.

Since today's failure Jamie had grown wiser. Though

still ignorant of the true nature of "cold tea," he felt sure that if only his mother would coöperate by buying and brewing tea . . . and he could pick up some empty bottles from the dump . . .

As this plan was unfolded, Michalina began to giggle derisively. Stanley's stolidity left him. He grew angry. Indeed, as understanding of the situation progressed, he began roaring with anger. "That cold tea Pestwicki's got, that's bootleg," he bellowed, pointing the toe of his heavy boot toward Jamie and Richard. "You sell bootleg you get pinched. You don't let me catch you selling bootleg. The cop nab you, you sell bootleg."

Wobblenski was not satisfied with words. He jerked the slumped Richard onto his feet and shook both boys till they couldn't stand. He yelled into their ears that Pestwicki was making fools of them, using them to sell his liquor for him; that the vegetables were worthless, only a blind; that to offer common vegetables for sale at a roadside stand, without the accomplishment of bootleg, would never produce sudden wealth.

Next day a disheartened Jamie and Richard, followed by Jeddy, went back to the fields with Jozefa to screen and sack onions. The four walked northward through the village. The road ran along the river's bank where the leafless willows now revealed rubbish-dumps that dribbled ashes and tins cans. The sky was heavily overcast. It was a giant slab of granite set between God and His world, a slab so thick that not even God Himself was able to move it. It shut out all glow and warmth and color from the earth. The foothills were forlornly

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wrapped in faded reds and muddied yellows, like tatters from past festival. Far up the valley, beyond where the hills seemed to meet, the sharp cone of Wing's Mountain towered like a threat.

The little procession passed by the store and the gasoline pump of Wobblenski. They passed the row of three Colonial mansions of their rich neighbors. Finally they were forced to pass the proud house with its cluster of locusts. Jozefa plodded on as one blinded, as one whose sight has been blasted by a light so dazzling that it remains branded on the retina long after the flash has gone.

The boys slunk at their mother's heels, followed closely by Jeddy. Their heads were hanging, their eyes down. They were like three pups recalled from sin, on whom the hand of Fate has fallen so heavily that self-respect is forever gone.

Through the chill gloom of that day Jamie and Richard screened and sacked. Jeddy looked on mournfully from the edge of the field. He was not permitted to share their labor. At least he could share their degradation to the last onion.

At five o'clock the boys were too tired to walk home. They curled up close to Jeddy's warm sides in the long hummock of coarse grass that edged the field, and went to sleep. They dreamed of brown bottles that turned into cash. They crawled home stiffly to bed long after night had come.

Michalina had remained at home today. It wasn't necessary to go back at once to Milesbrough to work

in the laundry. She had other things to attend to. She tried on her new red dress. She rouged her broad cheeks. She smoothed her fine yellow hair. She tried parting it so that it fell like two curtains of soft silk about her face. And swaying her hips from side to side, swishing the plaits of the full red skirt about her knees, she went down the road toward Wobblenski's store just as Tony Kublic came riding by on his bicycle on his way home to dinner.

Jozefa was fearful. She dreaded most of all Wobblenski's wrath. Yet after the boys refused to work one day longer in the fields, after they threatened to run away, she finally yielded weakly and allowed them to go back to work for Pestwicki, to sell bootleg concealed behind a vegetable-stand.

On the 5th of October Jozefa was again robbed of a half-day's work; she was taken to court in Milesbrough; she was fined for the boys' truancy from school; and again there was taken from her all that she had been able to save toward those shoes that would enable them to learn. And as if that weren't shame enough! The next day the boys themselves were caught at the roadside stand by two policemen who came roaring out from Milesbrough on motorcycles.

Jamie and Richard and old Peter Pestwicki were taken into court.

On the day when their case was called Jozefa walked all the way to Milesbrough. Old Peter pleaded innocent. He shielded himself basely behind the boys. He had hired a lawyer to defend him. Jamie and Richard, the

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lawyer said, were selling liquor that they had stolen. They were stubborn boys, known to be wild. Twice recently they had been found guilty of truancy. The mother had no control over them. The father was dead.

That stand from which the boys had sold liquor, the lawyer pointed out, was indeed before Pestwicki's house, but not on his land. It stood on public land by the roadside. Furthermore, two weeks before the day of their arrest, that is on September 23rd, last, the boys with the connivance of their mother had put up a similar stand before their own house. They seemed, however, to prefer carrying on their illegal business in front of Pestwicki's with the evident intention, in case they were caught, of throwing the responsibility for their law-breaking upon another.

Stanley Wobblenski was not in court. Not even the pleading of Jozefa had prevailed. He was angry. He would do nothing. She had permitted her young curs to sell bootleg. Well, had he not warned her?

Jozefa had no English. She could not make the judge understand. It was true she'd been in court twice before, when, because of lack of shoes, the boys were unable to go to school.

Jozefa had no money with which to pay a lawyer. She had no money to offer the judge. The boys were torn from her. They were sent to "Industrial." Where that was Jozefa could not understand.

She walked home alone from Milesbrough through the heat and dust of a hot October noon. She couldn't breathe. She couldn't weep. Her children were snatched

from her. They were scattered. Little Katherine was with the nuns near Chicopee-Mass. That was a day's journey. Jamie and Richard were at "Industrial." Where that was she couldn't know. Only Michalina was left to her, only Michalina left to her eyes.

There was small comfort for the heart in a letter from little Katherine that Jozefa found waiting for her when she got back to Harry's Mill. The letter was written in English. Not until she had passed a long anxious afternoon, not till Michalina came that evening from the laundry, was Jozefa able to hear it read.

"Dearest of Mothers," the letter said. "I am sick that I cannot see you. I cry in the night that I cannot see you. I cry in the day. I cannot forget that you are so far.

"The Sisters give us good eats. They got black clothes.

"I want to send you a present, a picture of God's Mother.

"I ain't got nothing to send.

"Your daughter, Katherine Zalinska."

Part IV: Banns

Chapter One

EVER since that ride home in the fordcar from Chicopee-Mass, on September 23rd, with the girl beside him on the front seat, Stanley Wobblenski's eyes had been full of Michalina. During the following weeks he had shown no disheartenment because of his failure to secure the vigorous Pietrowska for his bride.

Little Katherine was out of the way; Jamie and Richard banished to "Industrial." On the very day after the boys were sentenced in court, Wobblenski had driven Michalina home in his auto from the Milesbrough laundry in the evening. He had stopped in at Jozefa's hut to announce to her that tomorrow she and Michalina were to move over and live permanently in his house.

So it was that on this evening of Saturday, October 15th, Jozefa Zalinska sat for the first time as mistress in the kitchen of her rich son-in-law. Alone in the warmth and the brightness (for Stan had taken Michalina to the movies in Milesbrough), Jozefa was writing to her brother: "And now I inform you how my son,

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Stanley Wobblenski, permits me together with Michalina to live here in this house. I arrange his house. I care for these little ones.

"He has sent the Slambowska away. If he plans to marry the Pestwicka, at least there are no photos of her about.

"This is a small but a good-enough house. Michalina sneers it. She learned sneers at the high school. She looks out through the kitchen window. She sees our proud house up the river. She continues to pout and complain.

"This house is in the south part of town where the river turns. The road runs by us toward Milesbrough. Across is the farm of Slambowski. Stan owns the land that points out in the river. We have the cow, also seventeen hens and the new calf; together with two cows that are Stanley's.

"Formerly we were forced to walk to the church, but tomorrow we ride. We shall ride in the fordcar of Wobblenski the three miles.

"Dear brother: Now are you informed how well it goes with us here. I sit in a rocking-chair. I am a rich woman of America. I am forced no longer to work and bend with my back."

Chapter Two

A LETTER from Josefa Zalinska in America to Stanislaw Sadwinski in Poland:

"Harry's Mill, October, 1927

"Dear Brother: I send you this letter. I cannot send it swift enough. My heart leaps. Will it reach the stars?

"Stanley Wobblenski, the husband of my girl, Stasia, who is dead (God's will be done!), marries my second girl, Michalina. Glory be to God! So shall I continue always in this house. In my old age I shall have shelter. My bones that are old will find rest.

"Now I mention how Stan is very pleased to marry Michalina. She is 19. She is pretty.

"Stan owns the store and the gasoline-pump, together with this house and the land down to the river; almost a small farm. Our neighbors marvel at our good fortune. Now I inform you how others of our neighbors are busy with envy. The eyes of the Slambowska itch because I succeed so well. She sharpens her tongue. She opens her mouth wide against me. She goes about like a

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swine telling that I force Michalina to marry Wobblenski in order to keep this roof over my old head.

"Dear brother: These are unholy words. I urge you to spit on these words.

"No money is demanded for dowry. For a second wedding no money is needed. Yet is it unlikely that Wobblenski would take Michalina, cumbered by my carcass, without dowry. I have given him my cow, together with the seventeen hens and the new calf. I am content, brother. I do not complain. There remains to me, by the goodness of God, this roof over the last of my years.

"It is hard that you cannot be present at the wedding, brother. You and your wife, Julka, and your two sons. The wedding will be celebrated in one week, on Thursday, November 3rd. Twice the banns have been called. Stanley pays for the banns. Father O'Keefe will perform the ceremony at ten o'clock in the morning in the Church of the Holy Name in Milesbrough. There is no church in Harry's Mill. Many boys and several girls will attend them. Stanley promises good style. All those whom we know will go with us . . . there may be a hundred . . . except only the Pestwickis. They alone are refused the invitation to the wedding festival of Stanley Wobblenski and Michalina Zalinska. We will ride in autos the three miles. It will have the grandeur of a procession. Would that the glitter of it might fall in your old eyes! The Gutfinskis will go with us and their children. The Slambowskis and their children. The Staszkos. Stella Jawuska and her children. Mary Kublic

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and her girls. All that we know in Harry's Mill, and it is a greater village than Lovna.

"I will write you further of the feasting and the dance. The festival will be in a hall next to the church in Milesbrough. It will continue three nights and three days.

"The music will be on the phonograph of John Ripkar. There will be no cost for the music. Stanley pays for the festival. Afterward we will go to the photographer's.

"Dear brother: Now I write you how we will go to Chicopee-Mass; how we will go tomorrow in the ford-car, that the family of Stanley Wobblenski may celebrate his betrothal.

"Keep peace with God, my brother. May He send you whatever you ask. I will send the photograph.

"Your sister, Jozefa Zalinska."

Chapter Three

PROMPTLY at eight o'clock on Friday morning Jozefa heard the rattle of the fordcar over the runway. Stanley was driving out through the wide door of the barn. Jozefa hurried from the kitchen. She bundled her big body in through the back curtains and onto the rear seat of the car. She sat waiting, passing her rough palm anxiously across her mouth.

Finally Michalina came out slowly through the front door of the house. She was cool and demure. She whisked in her pleated scarlet skirt onto the front seat of the auto by Wobblenski's side.

No one but Jeddy to see them off! The dog was sitting obediently by the kitchen porch on a ragged patch of weedy grass, its dust still beaded with dew. With eyes fixed intently on Jozefa's face, Jeddy was trying to curb the eagerness in his legs, to blink back the pleading that kept watering his eyes. Even at the last moment he might be signaled to come. Twitches of hope quivered in ears and tail.

The little ones, Peter and Leon, had been sent off,

earlier, up the hill to the care of Mary Kublic. Tony was left in charge of the cows, the gasolene-pump, and the store. Tally was too engrossed by a rat-hole of promise in a rear corner of the barn to deign them a send-off.

The car bumped round the turn from the yard into the Milesbrough road. Jozefa leaned forward to see the front of the white farmhouse of the Slambowskis. It was a big square house with central chimney. Some former tenant had spread wide verandas about it. The twisted spindles were broken and dirty; the front yard plowed to the steps. Jozef Slambowski was thrifty. He must own more money in the bank than anyone else but Wobblenski. Jozefa now saw, with disappointment, that in that plowed yard beneath the dead apple trees there was not even one barefooted Slambowski child of all the ten to run in and report the grandeur of their passing.

Wobblenski turned the car westward. They rounded the end of the small hill on the top of which the cabins of Mary Kublic and the Gutfinskis were half hidden by oaks. Soon, leaving the river, they were out on the Milesbrough road, whizzing through the near hills, gently up a long easy grade, and before Jozefa could believe it they had passed through streets of small houses and bounded into the center of the town.

Stanley stopped at the side of the paved square, already half filled with autos, and parked before the white pillars of the Milesbrough House. He got out without speaking, and went into the hotel. Michalina and Jozefa sat waiting in the car, watching the Italian fruit-man

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opening his basement store. He was talking to the negro bootblack who kept his chair inside.

When Stanley came back his breath smelled strong of liquor, but his temper seemed tuned for the journey, and as he pulled his drab person into the car he gave out a grunt that jumped with Jozefa's joy.

They bumped down the length of the square, bordered on three sides by the spired white church, the court-house, the post-office, the red brick bank, and the stores. They passed over the railway tracks at the foot of the square and followed the broad avenue, between bare elms, that led out of town.

They were skimming along toward the south now over a stretch of state road. Houses and trees were fewer. Down the valley they flew between thick clustered hills, blue, vivid in the sun.

The day was one of God's smiles, yet hot already! What would it be at noon under the sun? The last wisps of morning mist, mixed with smoke from scattered farms, was being gently brushed away out of sight like hair that has thinned and whitened too soon. The faint threat of fall in the air, blown in their faces, was softened by an odor of sunburnt dust. The trees had thrown away their leaves to let a flood of sunlight through. It was October, late sweet summer. Such a covering of sunshine! Enough to keep the world warm forever!

Jozefa had always believed that Michalina would make a rich marriage, and now the Blessed Virgin had seen to it that it was so. Thought that Wobblenski had

consented to take her was warmth poured into the heart. In less than a week now the ceremony would be performed; on Thursday, November 3rd, at ten o'clock in the morning.

It was Stanley himself who had planned this holiday. They were on their way now to Chicopee-Mass to celebrate with his relatives and friends, to drink and make merry. For days the heart of Jozefa had blossomed in this plan. The novelty of the long ride, the unknown excitements of the city, pride in showing off her beautiful girl before the wondering eyes of the Wobblenskis, and best of all to the mother's heart, sight again of little Katherine's eager face, feel of little Katherine's choking arms!

In each town or hamlet that they passed through on their way south through Vermont and Massachusetts, Stanley made a halt. He would leave the women sitting in the car and go off to get a drink. He was experienced in carrying a great deal of fiery liquor. At first he would become cheerful, never hilarious, but by the end of the tenth drink he usually sank into sullenness. Gloom had settled over him before they were halfway to Chicopee-Mass.

Luncheon had been provided by Jozefa. They ate it from greasy paper-bags, sitting in the car tipped down toward a gravel bank by the roadside. Wobblenski offered Jozefa a drink. To her liquor was a necessary part of a festal occasion. She accepted, and even refreshed herself several times during the afternoon from the flask that her son-in-law carried in his pocket.

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Jozefa rarely took liquor. Costly celebrations were infrequent in her life. In the heat the raw liquid mounted to her brain. She was tired. She had slept little during last night, kept awake by the throbbings of anticipation. She had been up before daylight. She nodded sleepily during the afternoon. Her head rolled from side to side with the swaying of the car. Houses and trees swam rapidly together. Soon they would be there! Ah, the wonders of the city to look at! Ah, the clutch of little Katherine's thin arms!

Toward the end of the afternoon they entered a dingy suburb, rounded a sharp corner, rumbled through a covered wooden bridge, swooped across railway tracks, and shot suddenly up a steep grade into the center of Chicopee-Mass. A crowd of women and girls was pouring out of a factory into an open space hedged by stores and already filled by the onrush of autos. Wobblenski, stopping for a last drink, had difficulty in finding space in which to park the car. At last he worked it in at the end of a long row of motionless autos with their front wheels to the curb. Stanley disappeared into a brick building.

This time, instead of sitting still and waiting for him, Michalina jumped out. She ran into a shop where silk stockings were spread out in a party-colored fan in the window. For a time Jozefa sat alone in the dusk, watching the moving people. But the crowd thinned away from the pavements, the air began to grow chilly. Finally she climbed stiffly from the auto and began walking up and down the sidewalk to warm her mus-

cles and keep herself awake. The windows of the shops were lighted one by one. They glittered with china and clothing and hardware. Jozefa forgot where she was and how far she was wandering. At last she saw a clock in a shop window; half past five! She hurried back round the corner. She might be keeping Stanley waiting! For a moment she hesitated. Which was the fordcar? There were so many in that long line that bewildered the brain!

She picked it out from the others, the one at the end of the row, by its familiar muddled wheels, its black side-curtains. The car was empty. Not even Michalina had come back.

Before getting into the automobile Jozefa went across the sidewalk and peered into the shop with the fan of stockings in the window. No Michalina! She must have gone into another shop. Jozefa went back to the fordcar, squeezed in past the curtains and settled herself on the back seat. It was chilly and there was the confusing glare of lights outside. It was warmer and darker within the curtains. Jozefa waited a long time. Her head nodded forward. She curled herself about and laid down on the seat. She shivered a little, but gradually drowsiness settled over her brain. She was asleep.

After a time of oblivion Jozefa felt the familiar bumping and heaving. The car was in motion. She slept on, little disturbed by its accustomed sway. She realized that she was being again churned about on the back seat, pitched on the unyielding hummocks of the worn

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cushions, but she felt only a sleepy hope that through these rhythmic jerks and jolts she might be allowed to sleep on forever.

When she finally awoke some hours later it was from cold from the rush of the night air. They were skimming along on a smooth road. She could feel the even pulsing of the engine. It was quite dark now even beyond the curtains. Yet before her, silhouetted against dull gray, she could make out the head and shoulders of Wobblenski, driving in the front seat.

Jozefa raised herself in bewilderment and sat upright. What was Stan doing? Where were they going? Had they not already reached Chicopee before dark, before she fell asleep? Where was the feast to celebrate the betrothal; where the relatives of Wobblenski to greet them? Where little Katherine's arms?

Black telegraph poles and bare trees whipped by. The fordcar was flying through the night at great speed. Now and again a lightless house showed for an instant the outline of its pointed gable against the sky. They were no longer in the city. They were out in the country. They must be starting home. But why suddenly, now, and at night? Why before the betrothal, the feasting or the dance?

Jozefa leaned forward anxiously to question Wobblenski. Then her eyes grown sharper, she saw for the first time that he was alone. There was no one beside him on the front seat.

Michalina! Where was Michalina? In a spasm of fear

Jozefa put out her hand to touch Stan on the shoulder. She drew it quickly back. Something about that hat was unfamiliar. With a shock of terror she realized that the cap was not the slouched hat; that the back was not the hunched shoulders of Wobblenski. God of mercy! who was driving her off at this speed at night, and where? For what evil had he snatched her? With a groan of terror Jozefa tried to pull herself onto her feet. At this disturbance in the back of the car the man on the front seat was so startled that he turned his head with a jerk. He slammed on the brakes, without having time to think what he was doing. The very car itself seemed to leap with surprise. It slipped and skidded over the smooth surface of the road. Then during a few terrible seconds it turned half round, jumped sidewise like a frightened animal, and finally came to rest with its front wheels in the gutter, its radiator pressed against a telegraph pole.

The man jumped from the car. He seemed to think something was going to catch him from behind. "Great God!" he cried in a voice strange to Jozefa. He was groping for the catch on the rear door, trying to see into the car. "Who in the devil. . . ?"

The voice was strange, the place was strange, the smell of the night air was cold and thin. Jozefa was so scared she couldn't breathe or swallow.

"How in thunder'd you get there?" demanded the stranger, roughly. He had found the handle. He jerked open the door; fury pressed thick in his voice.

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Jozefa sank onto the floor. She crouched on her knees, wedged in between the seats. She was frightened nearly out of her mind. She could only cower there in the darkness and gasp speechless at the threatening questioner in the road.

"Some kind o' dago!" he told her, hotly. "Pinching a ride off me. Gosh! I thought you was the devil! Damn you, woman, you give me the scare o' my life!"

While he was swearing at her in that harsh, unfamiliar voice, the stranger was reaching in in the dark and grabbing hold of Jozefa. He was a short thick man, not unlike Wobblenski, but Jozefa could make out below his visored cap a square face with heavy chins. His right hand was artificial. It felt like a horrible claw. With this steel claw, clamped like ice-tongs, he tried to grab hold of Jozefa's arm, to drag her from the car.

"Some kind o' dago," he called her. "Some kind o' damned heathen dago!" He swore hoarsely. Jozefa could understand many of his words. She was unable to answer even in Polish.

The man had no sooner got her out and onto her feet, than he turned back to the car. He bent, looking it over, shaking his head. Then he got into the front seat and tried to start the engine. The car wouldn't move. The man got out again, muttering. Jozefa heard the words, "busted" and "phone." He walked back down the road toward a farmhouse.

To be left alone even in the dark was relief. Anything was better, Jozefa thought, than the company of

that irate monster who had abducted her and stolen the fordcar of Wobblenski, who had turned on her and sworn so that she understood, but whom she could never make understand one word even if her tongue were not tied up by fear.

Jozefa stood shivering in the dark and the cold. She had no idea in her poor head where she was; no idea how she happened to be here. Michalina and Wobblenski, ah, they must have been swept away forever from this world to so abandon her to the fury of a stranger!

Was he man or was he demon? She had been hardly able to see him at all in the dark. Had he not called repeatedly on the devil as on the name of his Lord? What had seemed to Jozefa a visored cap pulled down over a forehead now stood out clearly in memory as the flattened top of a toadlike muzzle joined by dark crimson wattles to a short heavy trunk. Instead of hands had he not brandished claws?

Horror swelled in Jozefa. She turned in panic and bolted blindly up the road. She seemed to hear pattering steps pursuing. Her back and shoulders ached as if clutched at by demoniac claws. She could feel . . . ouch! she could feel . . .

Up the road a little way Jozefa scrambled in and hid herself in the roadside bushes. Never before had her heart panted in such terror. She crouched in the dusty bushes, shivering in the mist. She'd been bruised by the jumping flight of the car after she'd startled the driver.

The creature must have gone back to some house and

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telephoned, for after a while a wrecking-car arrived and drew the injured fordcar away into the night. Jozefa had no breath with which to call out and denounce this theft. But at least she was left in peace, here in her hiding-place; she'd not been dragged off to torments in the hands of a fiend.

Chapter Four

IT SEEMED hours before Jozefa's heart quieted. The weight of the darkness seemed to press out the breath from her chest. Finally a rooster crowed at a near-by farmhouse. Longing for refuge stirred in Jozefa. She disentangled herself from the brambles, crawled out on her knees, got on her feet, and hurried down the road. Light had come timidly over the sky. Jozefa hesitated in front of a farmyard. A dog that was tied barked at her savagely. A man came out of the house, slammed the back door, and turned toward the barn. A light was shining feebly from the kitchen window.

The man was tall and carried two pails. He seemed startled at first by sight of Jozefa, but he turned toward her, and there was even a kindly note in his voice as he stood patiently trying to get some meaning from the two words of English she had to offer.

"Harry's Mill?" Jozefa pointed earnestly at the road. The man shook his head slowly.

"Naw," he said. "Ain't never heard o' no such place."

Some one opened the back door of the house. A woman's voice called, "What place she want?"

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"Can't make out," the man called back. "She's Polack."

"This is Watts' place," he said, turning to Jozefa. "What place you looking fer?"

"Milesbrough." Jozefa tried the word timidly, and again she pointed vaguely at the road.

"What Milesbrough she want?" shrilled the voice from the house. "Milesbrough, New Hampshire, or Milesbrough, Vermont, or Milesbrough, Mass.?"

Vermont. That was the word Jozefa wanted. "Vermont," she said, nodding her head.

The farmer pointed up the road in the direction taken by the wrecking-car. "If that's the place you're looking fer . . . ain't more'n two miles up along."

Jozefa scurried off in the direction pointed out. She hurried through the gray morning of a cloudy day. No birds twittered to urge her on. But she felt a let-down of relief when she found herself trudging along a street of houses. Long before the shops were opened she recognized the familiar outline of Milesbrough's square.

Tired and hungry as she was, it never occurred to Jozefa to pause for rest or food. She swung her great weary body into the Milesbrough road, and while it was still early morning, rounded the bend about Slambowski's farm. There was the headland; the river's dull sheen through the birches. She was in sight of Wobblenski's door. Jeddy rushed and leaped and barked about her. The kitchen was empty; no Michalina, no Wobblenski.

Without stopping even to see if the cows were safe,

Jozefa ran back past the Slambowskis' and took the short rocky road that curved up the hill to the cabin of Mary Kublic. Tony, she felt, would help her in her distress.

Peter and Leon stood looking out of the Kublics' door. With grave eyes they regarded the dishevelment of their grandmother. She arrived hurriedly, panting, her face gray, her headsquare awry, her purple dress soiled and torn. She pushed by the boys, into the cabin, without greeting. Tony was not there, but Jozefa found Mary Kublic and poured into her sympathetic ears words of bewilderment and terror.

She, Jozefa, had been bewitched as soon as ever she had reached the city. She had been strangely spirited away from the street of Chicopee-Mass. She had been caught up by a demon with horns and a tail. Where was Wobblenski? Where Michalina? What evil had befallen them in that great city, in the dark, without Jozefa, and robbed of the fordcar?

Mary Kublic's small hands pushed Jozefa down into a wooden chair. She stood by the side of her friend. Mary was short and shrunken, sharp and dry; her eyes disillusioned, her mouth a thin lipless line. Yet the words of her tongue fell on the ears of Jozefa like friendly strokings.

"The Holy Mother will not let Michalina be lost," Mary Kublic reassured her in Polish. "When he comes home at noon, Tony'll know what to do. He will go to Father O'Keefe in Milesbrough and learn what is to be

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done. Father O'Keefe is better and wiser than the police. He will not charge you so much money."

Later Tony came in for his dinner. He heard Jozefa's story; he started back at once for the store. He was going to phone, he said, to the police in Chicopee.

It was a day without sun. By four o'clock it had begun to drizzle. The two anxious women waiting in Mary Kublic's hut heard the sound of an auto rattling along in the road below. It was greeted by the barking of Jeddy. Jozefa rushed from the cabin and tottered down the steep twisting road to Wobblenski's yard.

There in the rain, by the door, stood the fordcar, mud-splashed, with wet curtains. Michalina (God be praised and His Holy Angels!) was just jumping from the front seat. Wobblenski, safe and solemn, was climbing out of the other side. Jeddy was making their return an excuse for an orgy of jumping and noisy excitement.

"Where in thunder you been, ma? How in the world did you get home?" Michalina was cool with disgust. There were white half-moons under her blue eyes. Her fair hair hung limp.

Standing now in the light of God's day, how could Jozefa impart to another the horror of her uncanny experiences of last night? Tremblingly she told how the fordcar, with her inside it, had been spirited away from the street in Chicopee-Mass.

"Oh, heavens! Ain't you got any sense?" Michalina spoke in petulant English. "You got in the wrong auto. That feller started off, not knowing you was there. I

bet he'll go ahead now and sue you for smashing his car up. We been having the cops out looking for you all night. Well, you sure spoiled the party, all right!"

Michalina dragged off sulkily into the house. But there was worse to face from Wobblenski. He had been drinking during the night and on and off all day. Now that he had at last found his mother-in-law he was in no condition to appreciate her.

"Fool! Idiot!" He turned on Jozefa savagely. "All the cost of my relatives to celebrate my new wedding! It is cost thrown away because of you!" Wobblenski sprang toward Jozefa threateningly, but he was too unsteady on his feet to catch hold of her.

Jozefa fled into the house, into her own room, and bolted the door. She dropped into a chair. Fear racked her heart. It was as if a curse had settled over her spirit.

Part V: Guilt

Chapter One

JOZEFA was up early. She opened the door. It was the day she awaited. It was Thursday. It was November 3rd. It was the wedding day of Michalina. Jozefa wore her full skirt of rainbow wool, her gala dress from the homeland. Over it, for fear of Michalina's sneers, she had forced on a scant sleazy green silk ready-made of America. Two soiled blue-print aprons of different lengths were tied about her waist. Over her shoulders was an old coat of Wobblenski's, worn through at the elbows and pulled apart at one shoulder seam, where the dirty cotton lining was visible. The three-cornered handkerchief tied under Jozefa's chin was clean and white. Her broad thick-skinned face, with its big mouth and flat nose, was serene, and in her green eyes lay contentment. Her body was big and clumsy and slow-moving. Ah, but her heart was eager and light!

It was a still, raw November day. The rain had ceased. Water glistened like snakes between ridges of mud in the fields.

For the last five days, ever since that abortive journey

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to Chicopee-Mass, there had been nothing but rain. "The weather in this country is wet," Jozefa had written only last evening to her brother. "One could drown in the fields. Terrible rains are falling. Last night the rain was without pity. Today it rains. The river is full. But tomorrow the sun will shine. It will shine on us like the mercy of God. Stan marries Michalina. Glory be to God! In my old age I shall have as good shelter as in my first years. Dear brother": she had written, "I await the day. There presses in me but one fear only. I mention that it bites in me like a mouse.

"This alone is my small fear.

"The Pestwickis are refused the invitation to the wedding festival of Stanley Wobblenski and Michalina Zalinska. The heart of Hela will sour. She will feel envy. She will imagine evil.

"I pray that the Lord God will chain back the Pestwick's tongue in her head. I pray that she be not allowed to curse the wedding day of Michalina!"

During last night the rain had fallen in torrents. It had seemed a cloudburst. Jozefa had feared that the house would be washed off the headland on which it stood and be carried into the river. She had been unable to sleep because of this anxiety, kept active by the pounding thunder of the rain. It seemed as if the leaden sky had been recast into millions of bullets that were being shot in continual volley onto the wooden roof.

Twice Jozefa had gotten out of bed and turned on the light. She had moved about on bare feet through the three rooms of the house. In the east room, toward

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the river, Wobblenski slept heavily. In bed with him were the two little boys, Peter and Leon. The west room was Jozefa's. Here, on her side the feather bed, slept Michalina, her last sleep as a maiden. To the north of these rooms was the kitchen, which served as the family living-room. Water began to dribble through the ceiling. At first a circle of plaster would become gray from dampness. Gradually moisture would gather and drip from its center. Jozefa placed vessels under the leaks; here a round white china bowl, there the gray agateware dishpan and the galvanized washtub. When she laid down again in the dark, Jozefa could hear the sharp drip, drip, dribble of water falling into these receptacles. The roof had never leaked before. It was an exceptional rain. It had been a wakeful night for Jozefa.

The din of the rain's steady downpour had lessened toward morning. Now in safe daylight Jozefa stood on the porch and smiled in security at her night fears. Rain and wind, she thought, how they batter more fiercely, how they howl more terribly, in the dark! And yet it was only God who brushed with the wind and scoured His earth with rain for the nuptials of Michalina. Now in His mercy He had sent this fresh and innocent day, presently to garnish it with warmth and sunshine.

As Jozefa stood on the kitchen porch she could see up the village street under bare elms. She could see as far as the red tin roof of Wobblenski's store, and the orange gasolene-tank standing straight like Pride before the door. Behind the store the brown hill rose abruptly,

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covered with a few scrub oaks and some scant dead undergrowth. The bare ground was littered untidily with wet papers, tin boxes, and ashes, all the refuse of many kinds which scatters out from the rear of a country store. On top of the hill were the weathered huts of Mary Kublic and the Gutfinskis, attended by numerous small outhouses and dilapidated sheds; by henyards fenced with every conceivable article of waste, barrels, boxes, crates, rusting automobile bodies, gasoline-cans, and onion-sacks stretched on roughly cut poles.

At the foot of the hill, this side of the school and store, were the dirty white board cottages of the Staszkos and the Jawuskis, shiftless ones contented to live like swine. Between these cottages sagged that blackened hut, that mean shelter that had been Jozefa's before God in His mercy had softened the heart of Wobblenski to take them in. At the foot of this south end of the hill, inclosed by the bend of the road where it turned toward Milesbrough, stood the square white wooden farmhouse of the Slambowskis, set so near the road that it was almost within calling distance of where Jozefa stood.

As she looked out from the porch, Jozefa was picturing in her mind the wedding procession that would soon form here in the yard and wend its way toward Milesbrough. Mary Kublic and her four girls would ride with the Gutfinskis. Tony would be forced to return constantly to Harry's Mill from the wedding festivities in Milesbrough, in order to tend store and look after the cows. He would be free only during the nights to

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enter into the feasting and the dance. But he was to be on hand this morning with the delivery auto to transport Mary Staszko and her children and Stella Jawuska with her children. Their men, Stan Staszko and Jan Jawuski, were away working in the mill in Chicopee-Mass. Stella Jawuska was near to the birth of her seventh child.

Through the thick whiplike branches of the willows along the river-bank Jozefa could even catch a glimpse of the orange clapboards of the proud house far to the north of the town.

Of all in Harry's Mill the Pestwickis alone were refused the invitation to the wedding festival of Stanley Wobblenski and Michalina Zalinska. Jozefa felt something that was almost pity for them soften her heart. But more keenly she felt regret that the procession of wedding autos, when it started out this morning, would be forced to take the Milesbrough road westward and so fail to pass to the north and by the stolen house of the Pestwickis. How the ugly eyes of the Pestwickas would have envied to see them pass! And yet in her chagrin at being left out of the wedding celebration might not Hela have pronounced some evil curse upon this day? Jozefa, standing on the porch in the chill damp of the gray morning, shivered with an awful terror.

No. It was well. They were in the Virgin's keeping. Doubtless it was the peaceful Mother of God, herself, who had caused the Milesbrough road to run westward by another way. Now the silly fears in Jozefa's heart passed like the silly fears of the night. In such warm

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light-heartedness as Jozefa's all fears pass upward like mist, and foolishness away. Hela Pestwicka. Bah! Hela and her curses. After today Jozefa could have done forever with Hela and her curses.

Jozefa was up early. But early as it was, Stanley, the bridegroom, had been up even earlier. For now she heard the whir of the fordcar. It came bouncing out of the barn. Stan's battered black felt hat and humped shoulders rose and fell. His broad face, with its high cheek bones and flat nose, was the same light tan as his hair and drooping mustache. His expression was sullen. He threw no greeting to Jozefa. The wheels of his auto slithered through mud as Stan drove off to the store.

Now Jeddy came running on light feet. Stan had let him out of the barn. The dog stood poised for a moment on the pebbly washed gravel near the steps. He sniffed the raw air as if some doubtful scent called him to attention. He lifted one front paw. For a moment only he seemed suspicious that all was not well. Then he ran to the porch to greet Jozefa, the white tassels on his ears erect, his plumed tail expectant.

Jozefa's mind swelled full of visions. She gave no attention to Jeddy. The dog turned slowly back down the steps, but he went not as if he had been ignored. He was still poised, princely. He seemed to be saying, "The queen can do no wrong." Jeddy was too much the loyal courtier to perceive a snub.

Tally, the yellow cat, sat on the railing of the porch, absorbed in herself. She was busily licking off dampness from her paws. She stopped and threw a look of disdain

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at Jeddy. "That's what you get, you fool, for your fawning." She recommenced her licking. It looked as if she were fitting on a wee pair of white fur gauntlets with her tongue.

There was a smell of water after days of rain, the scent of turned loam in the fields, of the damp bark of trees; the odor from wet manure; out of the piles, burnt-orange trickles ran down by the side of the barn.

It needed only the sun to lift this moisture from the air. Ah, God, send your sun swiftly! Loose it like a great shining exultant dog, princely, of fluffy gold, light of foot, bounding, eager to do the bidding of his master.

Jozefa petitioned confidently in her heart.

The birds that are the voice of God were silent. No sound of twitter in all that cold still air. Even on rainy mornings the birds begin early to chirrup and fuss, giving out little expectant notes, trying out their voices like musicians tuning up. They know when the clouds are going to thin. Even in winter they are ready in plenty of time, waiting to fling their hearts into sound when the sun breaks out.

Today there were no expectant chirpings, only a flock of sullen black crows that hurried away toward the south. Only ominous silence here at home.

Across the road elms held black branches before the white house of the Slambowskis. The Slambowski children ran with red hens in the yard. Mary Slambowska came out of her door. She was dressed in her husband's old coat and his pants. She walked down toward the

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road, tying a faded pink apron over her flat head and under her square brown chin. She had a large powerful frame, but on her coarse face was a cross, disagreeable expression.

"God be praised!" Jozefa called to her in Polish. "The rain is done!"

Mary Slambowska advanced to the center of the muddy road. She stood looking sullenly about. She hugged herself and shivered. "There is water in the wind, Jozefa Zalinska. The sun is dead. It is a day fit for evil."

"I smell no evil, Mary Slambowska. My heart rejoices inside me. The day I awaited! The wedding day of Michalina!"

"Michalina says it out in public that Wobblenski has the bloodshot eyes of a pig; that he drinks; that he kicks and beats."

"It is true that Stan drinks," said Jozefa. "I mention that this is not often. But, if so, is it not better to be beaten and kicked in a good house than to lie freezing the blood out of doors?"

"They say that Michalina likes another boy," stated the Slambowska. "That Tony Kublic meets her secretly."

"It is true Tony smiles at Michalina in the kitchen when he brings the canned goods," answered Jozefa, patiently, "but what is the offense of a smile? Tony Kublic is not in a position to marry. He has for himself no land or cow. Mary Kublic is a widow who works

for five children. She has nothing to give toward a wedding."

The Slambowska sniffed, but she made no answer. She turned and slapped off on bare feet. She went about her business of milking the cow, cuffing the children, and feeding the hens.

Jozefa went back into the kitchen. Anxiety darkened her mind. She could not pick out the words of the Slambowska from her heart.

Michalina stood by the window. Her hands were idle, her head hung down. She had not the way with her of a bride.

Jozefa went over to her and pushed her gently. "Go and make ready," she said in Polish. "Vanity will lead a bride to sit all day in her white dress and let people's eyes see."

Jozefa could feel how Michalina turned herself against her. "I'm not going to put on that old dress," she said in English. "I'm not going to marry Wobblenski. He's old, dirty, got broken teeth. Here in America girls marry only boys that they like."

Jozefa's heart swelled with disquiet. Her voice broke out: "You think you do well by yourself, Michalina; you think you are wise. You are foolish and ignorant. Turn yourself against Wobblenski, and where shall we find shelter? Scorn his hand, and whose hand will fling us food?"

Jozefa looked out of the window. The water had heightened the river. Never was there such a swelling! The devil bathed between its banks.

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She glanced anxiously at the clock. It was quarter to eight. By half past eight Stan would be back from the store. By nine the procession of wedding autos would start forth. Stan was to take Jozefa and Michalina, together with Stan Ripkar and Anastasia Gutfinska, in the fordcar. At ten o'clock this morning the marriage would be consecrated before the day was old.

But there were the cows to be milked, the hens to feed, much to be done in short time. Jozefa hurried out-of-doors. She waddled away toward the barn. The rain had begun again. It dribbled over a world of gloomy browns and muddy grays.

Now with a long shriek of his horn Tony Kublic rounded the delivery wagon into the yard. Jeddy rushed out, barking, scattering the mud with his paws. Peter and Leon rose from a puddle over which they'd been squatting out by the barn.

Tony called, without getting out of the auto. He called, he waved his arms excitedly at Jozefa. "Gee . . . hurry up! . . . get a wiggle on! . . . pile in!"

At sound of his voice Michalina came out quickly onto the porch. Jozefa met Peter and Leon hurrying to her as she came down the runway from the barn.

"The dam's give way!" yelled Tony. "Up to Wing's Mountain. . . . they been phoning. . . . it's going to be hell here in about a minute!"

"Tony tricks," thought Jozefa, "to upset the wedding day of Michalina." She refused to get into the auto. She informed Tony that she'd wait the coming of Wobblenski.

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Michalina had run back into the house. She came out now dressed in her red raincoat and cap. She hurried to climb into the auto. Tony pulled her in. Jozefa stood by the door of the barn. Tony and Michalina urged her to come quickly; they begged her to come. They pleaded for Peter and Leon. The little boys stood beside Jozefa. They looked up wonderingly into her face. They gripped her skirt with muddy hands. It delighted them to ride with Tony Kublic. Jozefa restrained Peter and Leon. She would not let them go.

Tony put an arm round Michalina. She smiled up into his face. All her heaviness fell from her. Tony kissed her hotly on the wedding day of Wobblenski.

Jeddy bounded onto the seat of the car. They bundled him into the rear. There was no time; they must be off up the road to warn others. Again they urged Jozefa to come. She only shook her head at their words.

They were off. The wheels of the auto threw up the water in spray. Peter and Leon jumped and clapped their hands at the sight.

Three minutes later Stan came home from the store. "He comes quick," thought Jozefa, "because it is his wedding."

Stanley jumped from the fordcar. He stood in the rain. Mud oozed up his boots. There was a scowl on his face. Wet drops ran from his mustache. He demanded roughly where was Michalina.

Jozefa told about Tony.

"I kill him, that dog! That dog of a Kublic!" Stan swore. The water rose about him while he swore.

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All night the water had risen in the river. All the morning it had clapped little gray hands above its banks. Now it rose in a terrible anger. The flood came down the valley. With their eyes they saw it come, a wall of water, quick and terrible, like a high gray tower.

It rushed between the headland and the hill. It spread over the land of Slambowski. It formed a river that cut off escape.

The flood gathered and rose. It swept in a torrent over the land of Wobblenski. Stan sprang toward his auto. It was whirled away before his hands. He turned and leaped up the steps of the house. Jozefa followed, dragging the boys. Inside the house they climbed up a ladder, they pushed open the trap-door. They saved themselves on the roof. They clung there without breath, their hearts pounding their sides. The thunder of falling houses filled up their ears; the sharp splitting of trees. They clung desperately to the roof; Wobblenski, and Jozefa holding to Peter and Leon; Tally clamped by every claw to the shingles at their side.

The waters ground the Slambowskis' house with their teeth. Screams ran through the air, the sounds of rushing and grinding, the cries of the Slambowski children that died without God on their lips.

Wobblenski climbed to the ridgepole. He was followed by Jozefa and the boys. It was slippery, yet they clung. They were riding a giant horse. Around them the world hurled furiously away; the bodies of cows, the grinding of timbers, the whirling of pigs, the struggling

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of horses! The madness of the waters, the madness! May the Lord God close the eyes from the memory of that madness!

They waited only to be swept from the roof. The wind lashed. The water snarled and bit. It was too slippery to cling. Rain caught in the eyes. Jozefa swayed. She clung to Leon. She clung to Peter. She prayed the Lord Jesus. Even Stanley called on the Mother of God.

All day they clung to the peak of the roof. Cold ate at their bones. The boys shivered like leaves. Spray filled up their eyes. Fear choked off their breath. Jozefa's lips were frozen. She could no longer pray. Her hands were stiff. She could no longer hold against the force of the water.

Wobblenski swore horribly. He blasphemed God because nobody came to their rescue. Jozefa knew there was nobody left alive in all the world to come.

The wind blew down from the north. It lashed up the river. The water rose to their feet.

Night came. Mercy of God, what a night! The cold! The darkness! The wind whipped. The rain choked. The house rocked under them. It sank down in the flood. They waited only to be swept to their death. "Holy Mother of God," prayed Jozefa, "grant us to go quickly!"

Suddenly, through the darkness, a house plowed down upon them. It was vast, like a boat, ablaze with light. It glided toward them swiftly. It came on them over the water, spitting out steam and smoke.

The windows of the house were eyes blazing fire. It

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came on them out of the rain, a fearful thing, bewitched, alive in the darkness. It towered, a thing of horror, turning and twisting; a ship of hell, full of hissings and evil. It struck such terror that they almost died.

Peter cried out. Leon cried. Jozefa looked up at that house. She was wrenched by tremblings. She could have fallen from fear. How terrible was the descent of that house! It crashed into the roof of Wobblenski. It hurled itself against them.

Jozefa felt the crash of the tall house. She felt the roof sink under them. It was their last moment on this earth. The next moment they would be swept to the cold death of the Slambowskis'.

They were flung out into the darkness, into the flood between the roof and the terrible house. Water closed upon them. Jozefa's eyes swam, her mouth was gagged by water. Leon slipped from her hold. She struggled. She clutched violently. Her hands touched nothing. She sank down through the water. Sight was blurred from her eyes, breath was pressed from her nose, thunder roared in her ears.

Down, down. Bubbles reeled in her brain . . . struggling desperately. Down, down. She was lost; she was smothered in blackness.

Chapter Two

JOZEFA felt herself rising. Her head came out in the air. Water drenched out her sight. She pawed, she beat with her hands. She sucked desperately for breath.

She saw a light. It came through a swimming haze before her eyes. Her foot struck something solid. She gave a convulsive leap. She hurled her whole body. A dark mass loomed above her. She threw herself forward. She caught at the tall house.

There were lights in the house. Jozefa saw Stanley climbing in at a window. She saw Peter climb. It was the mercy of God it was lighted, for they could see so little.

Leon was near. He gripped Jozefa and sputtered. He tried to scream out. The tall house was a greater fear to him than the water.

In pushing Leon up to the window Jozefa's leg was crushed. It was caught between the sunken roof and the tall house. The pain of the grinding was such that her mind grew black. Stanley pulled her in. Water dripped from her eyes.

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They were in the second story of the tall house. It smelled of warm kerosene. A lamp was lighted. Stanley sat in a chair. His clothes were dripping. The boys jumped wet on the bed. It was impossible to strip them. Only three days ago Jozefa had sewed them into their clothes for the winter. Tally sat on the table, licking her paws. Jozefa lay on the floor. Ah, how good was the light!

The people must have left their house quickly. They had had no time to put out lamps. They could not stop to put out stoves. The flood had torn their house from its foundations. It had come down the river in the night, giddy, dancing, and tipping. The lamps had shown through the windows. Water had reached the stoves. Steam and ashes had hissed from the doors.

The tall house had crashed into the roof of Wobblenski. It had caught and held to the sinking roof. Fallen trees and wreckage held it. The flood pushed fiercely against it. It pitched up and down with the water, but couldn't move on.

Jozefa could feel the house slowly settling down in the flood. It was sinking gradually, little by little. Water seeped up through the floor. It crept up the legs of the table. Stanley helped Jozefa onto the bed. The two chairs were lifted. They floated about, knocking into the wall.

There was a ladder in one corner of the room. Rung by rung they climbed up this ladder. The rising water forced them up. Suddenly the table rose and tipped. The lamp went out. There was no heat to be felt any

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more, only darkness that filled up the eyes, only chill that pressed to the bones. Rung by rung, up into blackness, feeling the way. Shivering, with jaws rigid, they were forced up the ladder. The boys clambered ahead. Stanley pulled Jozefa over the slippery rungs. At last they were driven through the trap-door into the attic.

All night they were in darkness. Hell's agony, what a night! What a wedding night of Stanley and Michalina! Stanley stood by a window. He braced himself against the swaying of the house. He looked out on the black rushing of the river. The rain fell in walls.

Peter and Leon slept, curled up like wet dogs. Tally sprang desperately about. Her eyes glowered in the dark. Jozefa lay on the floor. One moment she lay like one dead, the next she was brought back to pain. Christ Jesus! what was her suffering! The house swayed. Fear flapped in her stomach. "In one instant," she thought, "our breath ceases! It would have been God's mercy if we had washed down with the flood!"

Jozefa remembered her small fear, how it had gnawed in her like a mouse. Remembrance rose and spread through her mind like a stench. She knew the Pestwick had cursed. She knew the Pestwick had cursed the wedding day of Michalina.

Stanley walked up and down in the blackness. All night his groans filled her ears. "Cleaned out . . . ruined. . . . God! it's awful! All I get working . . . my store . . . my pump I got . . . my auto. I'm not so young to begin over again like a young man. God! In ten minutes I get ruined of ten thousand of dollars!"

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Light dawned on an evil day. The waters rushed with the madness of horses. They pushed with the shoulders of oxen. The floor of the attic was wet. The roof dripped. The air was solid with moisture.

Tally crept out of the window. She clawed her way cautiously onto the roof. She knew the water was rising. Fear drove her away.

All day Stanley walked up and down, flinging his arms like a madman. Terror was in his eyes. "I bet I don't live through no other night," he groaned. He saw himself going to his death.

The boys whined. They were cold. Hunger burrowed them like worms. Stanley swore at them that they cease. He would not let them cry.

Leon was sick with a terrible retching. There was nothing to come from his stomach. Peter kept heart. He went up and down shoving the water with his feet. He called out, it was the auto of Tony Kublic that sprayed.

At the name of Kublic, frenzy leaped onto the shoulders of Wobblenski. He swore: "I bet I swim. I bet some log carry me ashore. Look out, you Kublic! Look out, you swine!"

He went to the window. He made to climb out.

Jozefa had always spoken in favor of Stanley Wobblenski. Now she saw the thoughts of his heart. They were trapped. It was beginning to grow dark. Another night was near. The river was rising. It was now two inches above the floor. Stan must save himself while he could. If he tried to save others, how could he? One

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cannot swim with such burdens, an old woman whose leg is crushed and two children. No, let him who was strong enough go, let him cling to a board. The river foamed full of wreckage. Nothing would be better for those behind if he died also.

Jozefa raised herself on her elbow. She cried out that Stanley would not leave them. "Are you a beast, Stanley Wobblenski, and no man, that you go off and leave these two innocents to perish? The children of Stasia. (God's will be done!) She was a good wife to you. She worked hard. You are no enemy to forsake them. You are their father, their protector. They have looked to you for pity and they have found none."

Jozefa threatened him. "You shall never lie like a dead man forgotten in the grave! Your shame shall cry out!"

She called on God in her heart for more strength to her tongue. "The water kills your body, Wobblenski. Beware lest I curse you with a curse that shall shrivel up your soul! These innocents that you desert in death shall cry out to you from their coffins and you shall hear. One coffin for Leon who dies first because he is weak. One coffin for me who die in sin. One coffin for Peter, first from your loins. Three corpses hung about your neck while you live, Wobblenski. Three corpses strung about your soul when you are gone! Beware with what curse I will curse you, you who leave your children without succor, you who leave them still breathing in this tomb! Beware with what curse an old woman with death in her face shall curse you!"

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Stanley turned on her like a bull. "Bitch!" he cried. "Dog! Mother of dogs!" He spat. He kicked.

Jozefa froze, yet she was hot with anger. The terror of death was upon her, the taste of death in that darkness. A madness of terror seized her. She raised herself on her elbow. She shrieked. She cursed Stanley Wobblenski. She called on God to shrivel up his body, to stamp him out like a worm. She called on God's Mother to shrivel up his soul. She prayed that their three corpses be hung about his neck while he lived; she prayed that their three corpses be strung about his soul when he was gone. She cursed Stanley Wobblenski. With a ghastly curse she cursed him. She cursed him again.

Stanley swore. "Old witch! Go down to hell quickly." That was not enough. He kicked her fiercely. He hit her leg.

Jozefa was old. She had experienced many evils. She had seen violent dealings, but never such as these. The blackness of death settled through her. She could no longer hear.

When Jozefa awoke she was lying in more water. Leon lay, his head on her breast. He had grown weak. Peter stood against the gray of a window. Jozefa knew that Stanley Wobblenski was gone. He had climbed out of the window, Peter said; he had clung to a hencoop and whirled away in the flood. It would have been better for his soul if he had drowned.

Jozefa's leg was an agony. A hundred screams could

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not ease it. The water was cold. A thousand fires could never warm that cold from her body.

The water was rising. It would soon be night. It is a fearful thing for those that die . . . the dark! In going out of this world the eyes should see light. There was not left to them even this.

Leon would die first. When she could lift her head above the water no longer, Jozefa would go. And Peter! Here was horror! He was strong. He would live to be washed alone against the roof. Nobody would hear his cries. There was no priest to lay God on their lips. They would die with their sins on them. Their bones would lie scattered. All this was too much. The brain could not hold it.

Finally they were snatched from hell. It was a miracle that happened.

Tony Kublic climbed in at the window. He came like the mercy of God.

Jozefa's old eyes could not believe. It is a vision, she thought, a vision to ease the dying sent by the saints.

"Tony!" Peter clung to him with hands and legs. He jumped and scattered the water. Yet Jozefa's old eyes could not believe.

Tony swung the two boys out through a window. "Some raft!" he shouted. "I'll be back after you, Mrs. Zalinska."

Jozefa heard the raft bump hollow against the sides of the house. She heard Tony's voice grow fainter and fainter. She lay alone in the dark. All was quiet but the

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rushing of water. Even if she never saw light, Peter and Leon were saved!

Tony came back. He had pulled the raft up the river again and floated it down with the flood. He came with a lantern. He brought warm soup and quinine. "The kids are all right," he said. "Michalina's got 'em. They're beating it for Milesbrough."

He lifted Jozefa. He put food in her mouth. He shook his head at her leg. "Crime!" he said. "It's going to be some trick getting you out o'here."

Jozefa was weak from cursing, from cold, from pain, from lying long in water without food. How is one man, even with the goodness of God, to lift up a woman that weighs like a cow?

"Go, Tony, save yourself. May God's blessings bless you, and the blessing of God's Mother!"

"What kind of a guy do you take me for? This shack's going to hold till morning. Somebody'll come along and help us out."

It was Friday night that Tony watched with Jozefa. She had been in the attic since Thursday. He fished up boards that floated by. He raised her out of the water. He covered her with his coat. It was alone Tony Kublic who lifted her out of the grave. He would not leave her, when she urged, to put himself in safety.

All night Tony sat on a box by Jozefa's side. The house rocked. Water swayed on the floor. The lighted lantern tipped where it hung from a nail in a beam over their heads.

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Tony rubbed Jozefa's hands. He talked. He laughed. He lifted her courage.

"Some raft! Four coffin-boxes come floating down from the station up there to Lammark Junction. Greatest lot o' junk washed down you ever see. Every town up the river's cleaned out. We got hold o' the boxes and tied 'em together with rope. Michalina was helping me. Then we see Tally out here on the roof, and I come scouting out after you and the kids. Some lifeboat. . . . I'll say it is . . . worth taking out a patent on!"

In the morning the rain had stopped. The river had ceased to rise. It had heard of the goodness of Tony Kublic.

Tony called out of a window. Two men came through the fog. They had found a boat.

The men had come over from Milesbrough yesterday to help the Polacks on the river. One was tall, the other short. Both wore sheep-lined jackets and loggers' boots. Jozefa could not speak to them in English, but she was able to understand what they said.

"We come through yesterday," the shorter one, Pete Cronin, was explaining, "'fore the road went down . . . caved in clear acrost, just after you get past the Walter Smith place. We was bringing over a load o' tents and stuff for the Red Cross."

That voice . . . squeaky yet husky . . . it troubled Jozefa's ears. Where had she heard it before? Was it the voice of Saint Jozef that years ago had startled her once in her prayers?

The man was short and tubby. He had moist black

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hair; his eyes, without lashes, were sunk into the pudgy flesh of his face; his nose was carelessly rounded, and below a large mouth fell a series of lobster-red chins. He moved about the flooded attic, solemn, self-confident, and important. His right hand was missing, but he used an artificial one with easy efficiency, and to Jozefa, who saw pity in his squinted eyes, he seemed likable and friendly.

The cold had taken hold of Jozefa. She could not lift herself up. They carried her to a window. At least she would die in the light. She could not die without knowing where was Wobblenski. Her tongue refused to ask, her tongue that had sinned, her tongue that had cursed a bitter curse upon his soul, whether he was dead.

"They seen a feller come sailing downstream yesterday," drawled the taller man, Ed Bean. "He was holler-ing like hell, hanging onto a hencoop. They didn't have no way to git him. They're thinking he's got stuck down there. They kept thinking last night they was hearing him hollering. It won't do him no hurt. We'll see to him when we git round."

Josefa felt instant trust in Ed Bean. He was tall and lank, with graying hair. He leaned over her; sober, motherly, deep-voiced, dependable. His long arms were loosely hung. His face was pulled out in lengthy lines; a narrow nose flanked by deep creases that reached past a thin mouth to a grizzled chin. His eyes were small and gray and near together. They were mirthless, wistful, kindly eyes.

The three men lifted Jozefa tenderly. Tears came in

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her eyes. They carried her to a window. The raft was of four pine coffin-boxes held together with rope. Jozefa's shoulders shivered as they touched the dead-boxes.

They towed the raft ashore. The two Gutfinski boys and John Ripkar were there to help. They carried Jozefa on a stretcher, past three small brown tents and a smoky fire, up the hillside through the fog, under the trees. They laid her in the house of Mary Kublic, the mother of Tony.

The cabin was crowded full of the homeless. Her neighbors welcomed Jozefa silently. The two small rooms were close with heat and the smell of dogs, children, chickens, and the sick. They had put Stella Jawuska on the one bed in the inner room. She lay there groaning like a cow. The time had come for her to be delivered of her child.

They placed Jozefa on the other half of the same bed. There was a great fever upon her, sickness of the chest.

Before they left her Jozefa caught hold of the thin gray hand of Ed Bean and the hard, shiny, pink papier-mâché claw of Pete Cronin. She kissed them both fervently. Again and again she pressed them to her hot cracked lips. This act speeded the lank body of Ed Bean from the room. Pete waddled after him. "Gee! them Polacks!" he exclaimed. They went out of the cabin and banged the door.

Chapter Three

ON THE Saturday of the great flood, when they had left Jozefa in care of Mary Kublic, Tony, together with Ed Bean and Pete Cronin, started back for Wobblenski. Each of the three had fortified himself in the Kublic cowshed with a long drink of homebrew. "Great stuff!" Pete licked a drop from his lower lip. "Sure is!"

It was still early morning; the sky heavy and gray. Through the dim half-light the men slipped down the wet slope toward the river. The air was solid with moisture, the oak leaves slippery as brown satin. All about them under the stunted trees was cold and damp and desolate and still.

"One o' them Gutfinski boys seen Wobblenski," said Bean, "racing off downstream, hanging onto a hencoop. He was hollering like he'd got breath in him. We didn't have no way to git him till this morning we git the boat."

"Fog's lightening up some," said Pete. "Better get busy . . . make the try."

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The air was still and intensely raw. Smoke from the bonfire down by the river spread a choking tang through the odor of moisture. "Gee! this place is a pond!" croaked Pete, swinging his short arms and battering his broad chest. "Can't get loose from the feeling o' water. All this water standing around."

Tony followed the swing of Ed's long legs and the scramble of Pete's short bowed ones down under the oak trees to the edge of the river. Water stood halfway up the hill. It covered the ruin of every house on the street except two roofs that were not washed away.

They could see only a portion of that gigantic flood. The river heaved at their feet, a great, swollen, sullen creature, an army marching through the enemy's country with silent hostile rhythm. The sky was heavily overcast. No sun shone out to relieve disaster.

Along the brink of the flood flotsam and jetsam made the banks hideous. Soaked straw mattresses, brown and stained, boxes with pictures of oranges curling from their sides, broken crates, rags, papers, splintered clapboards painted white, carcasses of cows, pigs, and horses, the hair scraped off, showing pink flesh in places. Drowned fowls, even wild birds, things so swift and innocent you wondered their wings had not taken them to safety. Had they been trapped under the quick arch of the flood, or had they sunk down, their hearts sick at what they saw?

Cheap furniture everywhere, broken, piled up on the bank, leering out of the mist, or being whirled down in the full flow of the muddy stream: tables, chairs,

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bedsteads, even a cradle, its basket sides stove in. And over all that impenetrable gray, that lid of stone; God himself ashamed to look on His world.

Pete remained unnerved by these repulsive sights. As he and his companions clambered along the bank his tongue coursed on. "Gee! but I 'most got killed by a Polack onct! Last week. . . . I was down to Chicopee, seeing Foley . . . J. B. . . . furniture man. I was driving a second-hand Lizzie, turned in the day before . . . 1913, 'fore-the-ark model. Gee! it was some queer it held its sides together getting down to the center o' Mass'chusetts. I leave her setting to the curb. I was in trying to do business with J.B. He's got a last year's straight eight, low mileage, he was thinking o' turning in. I was planning on prying it out o' him and getting him to let me wheel it along home. Gerrity . . . R.T. . . . to the mills . . . overseer . . . you know the feller . . . he was out looking for a used eight.

"I didn't get things pulled off with J. B. Gee! after what happened on the way back. I was sure some glad I didn't. That dumb Polack . . . she must o' wanted to get out o' Chicopee or something . . . I don't know. . . . She'd been drinking or something. You can't never tell what's going on inside a dago. She crawls into that old 1913 and goes to sleep in there to the rear seat. I come out o' Jack's place . . . I'd been setting up J. B., hoping to limber him up some on that straight-eight proposition. Old Lady '13 was setting there to the curb. I hops in, never suspecting I'd got a load o' Polack

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woman to my rear. Sure . . . curtains was on . . . I couldn't see nothing in back.

"Gee! I was mad . . . I sure was. . . . I hadn't got J. B. talked round. I was coming along . . . not burning up the road none . . . covering that stretch o' asphalt at not more 'n forty-five . . . you know the place . . . before you get to the bend round by the mills there coming into Milesbrough. Gee! I guesst I was asleep, or something. Running Lizzie with my eyes open but, more 'n half asleep . . . I sure was. When, gee! that Polack woman in there to the rear she hops up and lets out a yell. I ain't what you'd call nervous . . . but half asleep . . . dark's a dugout . . . past midnight . . . not knowing there was a whizbang coming! It ain't so damned queer I slammed on the brakes. That asphalt was slippery . . . slimier 'n a snail. Say, those wheels skidded some . . . they sure did.

"Gee! we never come down within a mile o' where we went up! Landed up the bank . . . jammed into a telegraph pole . . . couldn't start her . . . tank was bust.

"Gee! you ought o' heard me giving that Polack woman hell! 'What in hell you after?' I says. 'Shoot, and shoot it out quick!' I says. I guesst she thought she wasn't deriving much benefit from her ride. She beat it 'sif she thought I was going to write her down for the price o' the flivver.

"I went back up to Watts' place and phoned in . . . got Art out o' bed. Garvey was doing night job. He come out with the wrecker. She weren't worth nothing

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. . . scrapped. But, gee! you oughter seen that Polack woman beat it! Wonder she didn't ask me to taxi her to Boston or New York or wheres'ever she was going to, in the wrecker."

"She must o' been the woman come to Watts' place last week," said Ed Bean. His deep, solemn voice drawled a contrast to Pete's quick, squeaky staccato. "She kinda scared Art some, coming on him out o' the bushes, waving her arms. He was going out milking the cows. She was kinda big-looking . . . some like a man dressed up. I never cared fer them Polacks none. They're stupider 'n hell, but they seem kinda honest if you're doing any business with 'em. Mis' Watts is always thinking any foreigner's a gypsy. If they can't speak English good, she's always thinking they're going to steal the house and chimbley. That Polack woman she says she was looking fer Harry's Mill. She must o' had eyes in her head all right, down there to Chicopee, picking out a Vermont license like she done. Art says he didn't know where Harry's Mill was. All he knew was there was a settlement o' Polacks over here some place to the river . . . he didn't know's he'd ever known what the place was called. I don't know's I could o' said what the place over here was named, myself, till the darned river'd got it washed off the map."

Tony Kublic was the only one of the three who was silent on the way along the river-bank toward the fire. He liked the men's mentioning Polacks before him. It showed they thought of him as an American who wouldn't mind hearing them slur foreigners. He kept

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his mouth shut. "No use shooting your mouth off," he told himself, "letting out who that woman was hitched the ride off Cronin."

Michalina had told Tony of that escapade of her mother's when they went down last week to celebrate the betrothal in Chicopee-Mass. That the ceremony was prevented by the sudden disappearance of Jozefa had been cause for exultation in Tony. It had produced furious resentment in the mind of his employer.

In front of the three tents brought over yesterday from Milesbrough was a fire of twigs and fallen tree limbs of which the storm had left plenty. Nineteen men of Harry's Mill stood silent about this fire. From time to time they spat brown fluid into its flames. They had tobacco to chew. They had little else to lift up the spirit. Some had failed to get away yesterday before the Milesbrough road went down. Others had lingered on, unable to give up hope of wresting some of their property from the merciless river.

At first sight the men seemed all of the same medium height, the same middle age, and to have the same sagging misfit to their clothes. Each had the broad face, greenish eyes, high cheek bones, flattened nose, big mouth, and coarse brown skin of the Slavic peasant. Over wrinkled foreheads and creased cheeks lay the dull, enduring expression of maltreated animals.

Tony had known these neighbors all his life. Here were the two half-grown sons of Jan Gutfinski. Their hut still stood near the Kublics' on the top of the hill.

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Jan, the father, was away in Chicopee, working in a mill.

Here were Jozef Kostrebi, Alex Zaluki, and Stan Stanko, owners of the largest three houses on the street. Their entire onion crop, stored in Kostrebi's barn, had been washed away. The road had caved in, the telephone wires were broken, leaving these survivors of Harry's Mill cut off from the rest of the world. Until the flood went down, no help could reach them now except from heaven.

During the night, under Cronin's direction, the men had patrolled the river. In groups of two they'd searched along the slippery bank, seeking the living and finding the dead. Between shifts they'd slept in two of the tents. This morning they'd been hungry. They'd eaten ravenously. Waxed paper bread-wrappers and salmon-tins littered the ground at their feet.

The Poles had no thought but to wait stoically until the water went down and let them begin the work of clearing away rubbish from their fields and rebuilding their homes. Zaluki had lost two children in the flood. Their bodies lay on the ground under a blanket in one of the tents. Every man had lost relatives or friends. They had lost home and food and tools. Some of them stood heavily in debt for fertilizer and seed. From whom could they borrow for a fresh start? The storehouses had been washed away, with them this fall's crop of onions ready sacked for the market. All this year's labor, all next year's living, gone!

The men were silent. They neither talked of their

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losses, swore, yelled, nor raved. They were Poles, hardened for generations to misfortune. For generations their peasant ancestors had worked, been despoiled, and then set about righting what others had destroyed. What better training for a flood? The work of months of the hardest kind of field labor, crawling down the field on hands and knees, weeding onions under the scorching sun; and then in one short hour it was as if God had plowed all their onions back into the soil.

Now they must freeze, they must starve, they must watch their little ones starve, and for a whole year, until the next crop comes. The men stood silent, without lifting their eyes to look out over the water that had swallowed up their homes. They were stunned. They were dumb. The only thought in their heads was: Begin again. Plow again. Rebuild. Begin silently. There is nothing to be gained by the tongue.

As Kublic and Bean and Cronin joined the group of men about the fire a sound of distant humming filled the air. Faint at first, it rapidly increased in volume. An airplane overhead was winging away toward the north, its gray wings hardly distinguishable against the low gray of the sky.

Every watcher sucked in a breath of hope. Would the flyer land? Would he bring in food before they starved? The thin whirl died slowly away. Heads were lowered. Silence fell again on the group round the fire.

But under no circumstance of hope or hopelessness was Pete Cronin ever silent for long. "Some flood!" He condensed into his emphasis of those two words all the

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horrors and adventures of that day. "It's sure queer what that blamed river thought it was doing. But, gee! what gets me is its doing the job up so clean!" His words bobbed like froth across the men's deep silence.

"Gee! I should think somebody'd get busy and do something. They oughtn't to let 'em keep on cutting the trees off up there to the north. It's cutting the trees off lets the water down. Gee! you'd think Congress'd get busy and make 'em stop cutting off trees. I never raised nothing myself. I got the used-car agency over to Milesbrough. But if I'd got my whole outfit washed out, I'd tell the world . . . I sure would!"

While he was talking Pete was kicking something free from the wet leaves with his boot. Tony looked down to see what it was. For a moment he thought it was a dead rabbit. The river had already given up so many bodies of rabbits and hens and birds and dogs. The dead animal was about the size of a rabbit, but the small stiff woolly corpse was that of a cat, a yellow cat with white paws, drowned and drabbled, its fur caked with mud.

Tally. Tony recognized the Zalinskis' cat. He had watched Michalina fondle it. He had seen Jamie and Richard teasing it. And how Jeddy could maltreat that cat! springing at her and letting his jaws close about her neck, just nipping with his sharp teeth. Tally would cower and cringe. She would feel the teeth, never sure that sooner or later they would not really bite. She would crouch and growl and snarl. And yet in her terror, in her quick escape after release, there was always

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about Tally the deportment of one who holds herself superior to her torturer.

And Jamie and Richard, before that day, blessed for all, when they were sent upstate to "Industrial," how they had loved to tease Tally! Not with physical torture so much as with that stab to the quick, the torture of pride. Jamie would pick up the cat by the four paws and hold her there upside down within an inch of the ground, then suddenly let go and watch her overturn so swiftly that she always landed on her feet. This was a perpetual wonder to the boys. All this indignity Tally would endure with a look of disdain in her eyes. No outrage to the body had power to penetrate the thick armor of scorn that covered Tally's soul.

It had been Tally's agonized mewing, yesterday afternoon, from the roof of the sunken house, that had attracted the attention of Tony and Michalina. For hours they had been anxiously searching along the edge of the flood for some sign of Jozefa and the boys. It had been Tally who first gave hope there might be some one alive trapped under that roof out there in the flood.

Tony stooped down. You couldn't offer the insult of pity to Tally. Somewhere her overturned spirit must have righted itself swiftly as if on springs. Even for death there was a sneer on her fixed jaws.

Tony carried the small wet body with the wilted yellow tail to the tent where the men of Harry's Mill had laid their dead. Within the flap of the little morgue he placed Tally on moist brown oak leaves and covered her with a damp onion-sack. When he could lay hands

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on a shovel Tally should have that lonely burial that was emblematic of her spirit's supreme withdrawal.

Tony walked on toward the north, away from the fire, to the place where they had tied the boat and the raft after this morning's early rescue of Jozefa through the fog. The boat was still there, tied to a tree, but during the time that Tony'd been gone the flimsily built raft had broken up. The coffin-boxes had worked loose from each other. Three of them had been pulled away by force of the flood and were gone. Only one box remained still lashed to the tree.

Tony climbed into the flat-bottomed boat and sat down on a thwart. He was hungry, but he had refused to eat. He felt resentment against the men by the fire, to whom it hadn't occurred to deny themselves. No one could tell how long they'd be cut off by the flood. Such food as there was ought to be kept for the sick women and children up there in the huts.

The great volume of water coursed on, sinister and persistent, a thick brown muddy stream, twenty feet above its normal level. Yesterday Tony had driven a yellow two-by-four into the spongy bank and notched it at the height of the water. Today the flood had gone down two inches. What desolation would it disclose? Would anybody ever have courage to pick it all up, burn, clean, bury, and rebuild? Would the terrific, irresistible onrush of water ever sink down?

There were two roofs visible above the flood. Under one of them Tony had spent last night with Jozefa.

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This other, almost at his feet, was the red tin roof of Wobblenski's store.

But even if the store were finally uncovered intact and brought back into use, where was the village to which it would minister? What was the chance, even if he went back into business, that Wobblenski would ever again give a job to his rival? No, whatever renaissance awaited Harry's Mill, Tony knew he was jobless and in love.

Tony had felt vaguely disgraced by the indifference of the men round the fire. No one, he realized, wasted love on Wobblenski. But that was no reason for not helping the man. At least Cronin and Bean were planning to go after Wobblenski. Tony hardly dared to wonder what would happen after that. He felt again warm arms around his neck. He felt a hot moist cheek against his own. Before Michalina left him yesterday to hurry to Milesbrough with Peter and Leon, before they parted in the rain on the Milesbrough road, Michalina had promised. He had her promise. And in spite of Wobblenski, couldn't a girl marry whom she chose? What if Wobblenski had paid for the banns and the feast? That didn't make Michalina his wife. Not even the formal betrothal, thanks to Jozefa's blunder, had ever come off.

Tony had walked a little way with Michalina yesterday. She had been shivering nervously from the horrors of that day. She had been afraid to go along the wet road in the dusk with only Peter and Leon. They had had to clamber around the south end of the hill, above

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where the Slambowski farm used to be, until they reached that part of the Milesbrough road that was still usable. Michalina had clung to Tony. She had begged him not to go back to the sunken house. She had put her arms tight round his neck; pressed her cheek, wet with tears and rain, against his own; and begged him with all her might not to risk his life again.

There in the middle of that terrible flood, with death and destruction all round them, Tony had felt the warmest, sweetest ecstasy pumping through him. He had held Michalina for a moment in his arms. He had thrilled at her anxiety for his safety.

It was only by a miracle, she said, that he had been able to save Peter and Leon. She had run along the bank with him, helping him pull the clumsy raft upstream. She had stood on the shore, riveted by terror, while he poled out and steered it downstream with the current on that mad ride to the sunken house. He had succeeded in getting Peter and Leon ashore. But she couldn't ever live through watching him do that trick again. If he tried shooting down again on that crazy raft he'd sure get drowned. There wasn't a chance in the world of saving Jozefa. Her mother was lost. Oh, she couldn't let Tony go!

"Oh, Tony, you ain't going! You ain't going!" Michalina's anguish had been intense. Sound of her sobbing was still sweet in Tony's ears. Every inch of his body quivered with pleasure as he remembered. Her face had never looked so pretty, her cheeks so pink, her eyes so blue, her hair so fair under the red cap.

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"There ain't a chanct in a hundred, in a million, you can save ma," Michalina had sobbed. "The water's coming hard enough to push over anything. I wouldn't ask you not to go, only there ain't any chanct. Listen, Tony, you'll sure get drowned." She had pleaded so earnestly. He had had to hold her in his arms and soothe her. It was exquisite pleasure to remember. He had finally persuaded her to go on. There didn't seem to be any room in the two crowded houses on the hill. You couldn't tell how much more the water might be going to rise. He had fretted to get Michalina to safety. Finally she had gone off bravely toward Milesbrough, carrying Leon and followed by Peter and Jeddy.

It hadn't occurred to Tony then that the road, running gradually uphill as it did all the way to Milesbrough, might be unsafe. He had thought only of their getting to a place where there was shelter and food, before dark.

It had been late yesterday afternoon when Cronin and Bean came through from Milesbrough with a truckload of food and blankets sent over by the Red Cross. This morning they had told Tony of seeing the road cave in last night, this side the Walter Smith place, near the gravel-pit, about halfway to Milesbrough. They must have reached Harry's Mill, the men thought, about five.

On the way they'd heard a roar. The ground had slumped in behind them. They left the truck, went back with the lantern, and viewed the immense hole, a hundred feet across. A new river'd broken through,

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they said, water racing all over the place. The men couldn't remember seeing anybody on the road. Tony couldn't say at just what hour Michalina had started. It must have been about four or half past. It was beginning to grow dark, he remembered, as the little procession, Michalina with Leon in her arms and attended by Jeddy and Peter, had filed solemnly away.

Had they gone down with the landslide? Had they stumbled into that chasm in the dark? There was deep anxiety in Tony's mind. A great jagged dread seemed to tear down through his entire body.

In order to go back to Jozefa he had deserted Michalina. After she'd gone he'd begun pulling and working the bulky raft for a second time up the river-bank to that place a mile upstream near where the former house of the Zalinskis, stolen by the Pestwickis, used to stand. From there he had floated quickly downstream onto the house far below that was caught on Wobblenski's land.

They had been able this morning to bring Jozefa ashore. But now such torture as Tony was forced to suffer in his mind. Michalina. Why had he left her? Why had he turned back to save Jozefa, old, already as good as dead? Michalina had begged him to go with them. He had not stayed with her. He had not protected her. And now perhaps she was dead.

Tony sat in the boat, waiting for Cronin and Bean. Gradually the soft drone of an airplane returned to his ears. He looked up. Against a leaden sky the powerful gray biplane was passing steadily down the valley. It became a gray blot linked to a fading roar. Then it

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swooped about at the south and, flying low, started up the valley again. Suddenly, up north there, it disappeared altogether.

Tony, seated in the boat, leaned his head in his hands. He had been awake all night. The fiery homebrew had mounted from his empty stomach to his weary brain. In spite of the ache of his anxiety for Michalina he fell asleep.

Chapter Four

ON THAT Saturday morning Jamie and Richard were pushing steadily south through a cold gray watery waste in the center of Vermont. Jamie walked in advance, shivering, his hands pocketed, his elbows pressed rigid to his body, a visor cap pulled determinedly to his nose. His shoulders humped under his thin jacket; corduroy knickers flapped their unbuckled straps halfway down his shins. His shoes were mud-caked and soggy.

"Huh?" Jamie turned halfway about to regard the stumbling misery of Richard, through whose nose the tears trickled unchecked. After a day and two nights of starvation the arrogance with which Jamie habitually regarded the younger brother, permitted to run at his heels, had melted into a feeling of companionate misery and solicitude. Richard's white face and lips had taken on the pinched look of a hungry old man.

The boys had run away from "Industrial." The expedition, planned solely by Jamie, had set forth on Thursday night. Today was Saturday. Part of the first

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night had been spent under the board platform of a rural railway station; an hour or two of the second night in a deserted school-house. Here Jamie had contrived a fire. One loaf of water-soaked bread had been their provision.

Jozefa had written the boys of the approaching wedding of Wobblenski and Michalina. In reading, their mouths had tasted the feast.

Jamie, catlike, was now feeling his way down the valley. He was quite ignorant that disaster had wiped out his home. It was a greater distance to Harry's Mill than he had imagined. Promptly, during the first night and at the end of only a few miles of travel, that boob behind had begun to drag his feet and complain.

Now, on Saturday morning, as they trudged over the soaked turf by the edge of an immense swollen brown river, Jamie began to sense the familiar in the set of the barren fields, the outline of the small hills, the clustering of trees. At last he knew where he was.

"Huh!" he grunted at Richard, pointing south with one elbow. Arrogance could again uplift. Again Jamie grew cool and lofty in manner. A great weight had fallen from his spirit. He had accomplished the journey. There were no houses in sight, but he knew by the look of the land. In spite of the unusual height of the river, in spite of the unfamiliar ponds of water standing about, he knew by the shape of that next rise that Harry's Mill lay just beyond. The wedding feast would not be finished. They'd only have to beat it to Milesbrough, then, oh, boy! what a feed!

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Silence and chill lay over the brown racing river, the bare soggy fields; only the sound of the boys' feet sucking out from slop between sods.

Now far overhead from the south came the faint hum of an airplane. Jamie paused and looked up. Then both boys, electrified, stood stockstill, their shoes sinking into marshy soil. A tiny winged gray machine pulsed nearer and nearer through the dull sky. The boys had no thought for the sodden earth. Their eyes gazed upward. Their hearts were pulled from them; they felt themselves soaring. They were swooping, they were roaring up there in the sky.

The boys' feet stumbled along. Their eyes were fixed on the biplane, now large and booming over their heads.

Suddenly they stumbled, sank; they were pitched forward onto their arms and knees. The earth became liquid. Water rose thick and cold. The ground slumped in about them, caved in toward the river. From the shock of the cold Jamie realized in terror that they were washed into the flood. He struggled and sputtered in thick freezing water. No foothold; nothing to catch hold of; the water pushed them and galloped along.

They were caught, sunk, submerged, swallowed up in the thick yellow stream. Their mouths were filled with muddy water, their bodies slapped with cold, their eyes smarted. They were rolled over and over. Finally they came to the surface, sputtering, struggling. Jamie tried to strike out for the shore. The power of the river sucked back, and tumbled him along.

Suddenly in the loose swirl of the stream they were

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hurled smack against a flat hard wall that might have been the side of a barn. In a moment Jamie had clambered up; he was sitting astride its top; he was tugging Richard and pulling him up to his side.

They were perched on top of a big signboard that was standing upright on what used to be the bank of the river. It had been floated down and was now caught here against bushes and trees. It had been pushed up into a nearly vertical position and seemed to be pausing a moment before hurrying on with the flood. The boys clung to it desperately; they rode it astride. They were wiping the water from their eyes, they were coughing it out of their throats.

It wasn't long after the shock of the ducking before Jamie thought of the airplane again. But now it had passed far up the valley and was gone.

The boys dared not jump from the signboard; they wouldn't risk it to let themselves down into the stretch of icy brown water that boiled between them and the shore.

Astride the sharp top of the signboard was like riding a board fence that was wobbly and showed signs of tipping. In all the valley about them there was no house, no human in sight, only the low empty sky, the merciless sweep of the river. Richard sputtered and blubbered. He wailed audibly at his plight. Jamie, only a little more stolid, had the faith of the young . . . sure something was going to turn up!

For over an hour the boys clung shivering astride the uncertain signboard. They were so cold there was

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no longer any feeling in their arms. Richard had shut his eyes, his lips were blue. He had ceased to whimper, though his chest still panted with great shivering sobs.

It was again Jamie who first heard the faint humming. The airplane was coming back down the valley, following the river. As the sound grew louder Richard opened his eyes. The plane ducked toward them, became huge and whirring. The boys waved and shouted. They saw a man's head leaning out. Oh, sure he saw them!

It was with a feeling of having his insides drawn out of him that Jamie watched the plane pass over them and purr away to the south. They were desperately alone. In the stillness that followed, all the desolation of that wet, empty, cold, flood-swept valley seemed to soak into Jamie's spirit. He closed his eyes, his head drooped, he gritted his teeth to shut in groans and sniffles that were like Richard's.

It had turned. It had turned round. The plane was coming back! Jamie clung to the signboard with his knees. He flung up both arms and waved frantically at the enlarging plane. He screamed up against the great roar above him with all the strength of his lungs.

The gray plane flew at them so near it seemed as if it might almost knock them off their perch. The motor thundered in their ears. Excitement whirled madly inside them.

It landed in the big rough field by the river. It tore and ripped, tipping and tottering across. But it stopped

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right side up, its spread wings unbroken, its engine quiet, its propeller revolving slower and slower.

Two men jumped from the plane. They ran across the field to the point on the bank nearest Jamie and Richard. To the boys the relief was so great it seemed as if they were already safe on shore.

Both men wore leather jackets and leather caps tight over their ears. The pilot was bigger than the other, his face redder. As he came toward the edge of the flood he was coiling a rope in his hands. Eagerly the boys watched him. He went up the stream a little way and bending over tied his rope to a log. He waded in as far as he could and yet keep his footing. He gave the log a great shove out into the river.

Easy! thought Jamie, leaning out from the shore-end of the sign board. He clung tight with his knees and stretched both arms to catch the log dancing and rolling his way.

Gosh! Missed it! The rope was too short, the log whirled by. Jamie's hands were empty. He sat up, sick with chagrin. The log had passed too far from him. He couldn't touch it!

"Gosh! Damn it all!" Jamie heard the big man swear. He saw him jerk back the log as though he meant to whip it to hell.

Together the two men launched a whole tree. It was a young sapling with bare branches that had fallen out into the stream. They tied the rope to its roots.

The tree, pushed loose, rushed on toward the sign-board as though intending to sweep all before it. The

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men wound the rope round a stump. The branches caught against the signboard. Jamie flung himself clear. He heard a shout from the men before he went under. Once in the water, he held desperately to the thick network of twigs. It seemed a long time before he felt a grip on his collar and felt himself dragged sputtering into the air. Richard, too! He had dared the jump, he had caught at the tree. He'd been pulled safe up the bank. He wasn't such a booby, after all.

Both boys scrambled onto their feet. They stood dripping. The smaller man was helping them wipe the water from their eyes. Water still rushed about in their ears. Their teeth were chattering as if their motors had been left running.

"Say, what you kids think you were doing?" The big guy stood, wet with muddy water to the armpits. He was coiling up the rope.

Jamie didn't answer. The water had been brushed from his face; vision had returned. Through drips from his hair he was looking across the field to where the great biplane rested, after having given its propeller a last lazy twirl.

With a bound past their rescuers Jamie and Richard beat it across the uneven ground. They paused by the side of the biplane. Its gray sides loomed above them, its giant wings outspread. Such a feeling of wonder and worship filled the souls of Jamie and Richard.

The men strolled up behind the boys. "Don't spend much time thanking anybody," said the big guy. He was still coiling the rope.

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Jamie flung him a glance over his shivering shoulder. "How about it, Mister?" He forced his teeth to stop chattering. "Say, give us a ride!"

Tony Kublic was roused from sleep by sound of a rasping voice. Pete Cronin was approaching. He was talking to some one as they came through the trees. "Sure is . . . feller you're after . . . Kublic . . . seems to be the hero round here. Yep . . . ain't much like a Polack, though . . . real American go-getter . . . none o' your Polish hang-dog . . ."

Tony caught sight of Pete waddling toward the boat along the slippery incline. He was gesticulating with his short arms. Above his rolling body in the sheep-lined reefer, his round solemn red face with its small eyes and lumpy features seemed swollen with importance. Bean towered awkwardly behind, and beside him walked a slim stranger, a man Tony had never seen before. He must have dropped from the skies since Tony left the fire. He was a young American in modishly rough knickers and jacket. A camera in a light leather case was slung over one narrow shoulder, a field glass over the other. He had on black leather puttees, splashed with mud, and a flyer's helmet.

Pete saw Tony. Hurrying to him, he laid hold of him officiously by the arm and jerked him out of the boat onto the bank. The slim stranger was picking his way toward them over the wet leaves. At sight of his tweed-clad thighs and leather-covered shins Tony felt himself shrink into a drabbed alien. "College," he

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thought, using the word as an adjective and applying it to the stranger, while his mind tried to form it into a sneer.

The eyes of the newcomer blinked as if they missed the goggles that dangled from his hand. He had a smooth, thin, long face, and, as his blue eyes met Tony's, he grinned and held out his hand. "My name's Cole," he said in a voice Tony liked. "Seymour Cole of *The Press*. We hopped off from Boston this morning . . . covering the flood. We've been making a kind of forced landing . . . I guess you'd call it . . . up there. I guess flying's all right as long's you keep going." He brushed his white hands over his clothes that were dotted with yellow mud. "But take it from me and cut out the forced landings!"

The four men stood up the bank from the boat. Their boots printed into the squashy black soil. While he was talking Cole whipped out a notebook and a gold-mounted pen from his pocket. At sight of these Tony stiffened, but Pete proved eloquent in handing out copy. "Gee! she's pulled through an awful lot!" He was continuing on account of Jozefa Zalinska's sufferings. "I don't know's I'd wonder so much if she pulled through pneumonia, too. She's got it all right . . . tell by the way she's coughing. Gee! but these Polacks, they can stand an awful lot! This guy here"—he poked with his elbow at Tony—"he gets the kids out . . . then he goes back after the woman. You ought to look at the crazy kind of raft arrangement he's got! Coffin-boxes . . . they come down the river.

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He got it all figured out, floating boards down, what place you'd got to start at up there to float down onto that sunk house. But how in hell he could steer the truck . . . that's what gets me!"

Pete now noticed that the raft had broken up. Only one of the coffin-boxes was left tied to the tree. The other three had disappeared. "Wonder it held itself together that long," he said.

"He got the kids out . . . Wobblenski's, store-keeper's; he lit out . . . left the woman and kids to drown. She'd got her leg hurt . . . weighs like a ton. Kublic couldn't do nothing but jack her up aways.

"This morning we got hold of a boat . . . got her ashore. She keeps yelling for a priest . . . wished like the devil we could get her a doctor."

"This must be about the worst flood you've ever had round here," said Cole. He was keeping briskly at his writing.

"Started in with raining last week," drawled Ed Bean. "River got full-up, and reservoir up to Wing's Mountain. Started in again round midnight, I guest was, Wednesday. Reservoir bust. Thursday the crash come."

"We were working away last evening over a contour map of the state of Vermont," said Cole. "Wallace, the one who brought me up here, was saying he guessed he could steer round up here by the lakes. When we got up here this morning we found pretty near the whole state of Vermont was lake. Wallace was saying he wasn't going to try making any landing.

"We got Brattleboro located. It was along farther on

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up, above here aways, we saw two kids. They were coming along south. The ground must have been full o' water. It just seemed to slump away all of a sudden under their feet. We saw them get washed up against a signboard standing up out o' the water. Next thing you knew those kids were climbing up and sitting astride. There wasn't any chance of our getting them that we could see. There wasn't any place around that looked like landing. There didn't seem to be much of anything we could do except send back help if we could find any kind of place for landing farther on up.

"It was on up this valley we saw a house caving in. We'd just been watching two men in a boat getting a woman and three children out of a second story window. Next thing you knew the boat tipped over. The men came up all right. But the woman and children didn't come up.

"I tell you I saw one man get out of his auto just in time! The road seemed to just fall away right in front of his front wheels. It'd looked solid enough the moment before. The auto went in up to its hubs. You ought to've seen the man beating it up the hill on all fours. For a minute I thought he wouldn't make it.

"I guess we've been up over about all the state of Vermont. We turned round and began coming back. You wouldn't have seen more water if you'd been out over the ocean.

"We got Rutland located . . . that's what we were starting out for. They were saying down in Boston last night Rutland's cut off . . . they haven't got any

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lights; whole sections under water, three to twenty feet or so deep. I guess there's been a big loss o' life.

"Wallace was signaling he thought he saw a place where he could land. If you'd told me this morning before we started out that I'd get a chance to land within swimming-distance of Rutland! . . . but you know I couldn't help thinking about those kids . . . riding that signboard . . . down below there . . . it was in a kind o' lonely section.

"I wrote on a paper, 'How about going back and seeing about those kids?' I guess Wallace didn't bother about reading it. He was getting busy, turning round, heading south already.

"This part of Vermont? Why, whole towns've been washed out. They're trees up there . . . big ones . . . pulled out by the roots. And more water! When it's gone down it's going to look as if an army'd cleaned up the place."

"Army!" Pete Cronin couldn't give over the talk any longer to this jerky, excited boy. "Gee! I've seen what an army can do, believe me! I was staying on over there in 'nineteen . . . driving a truck for the A. R. A. Gee! I remember one place . . . Poland, I guesst it was . . . not more 'n twenty houses to start with, and about every blamed house in the place burned down. People round, living in barns and dugouts. The Germans'd made off with about everything, and the Russians'd come along and cleaned 'em out some more. All the church they'd got was a cellar . . . and you may not believe it, but I seen one old feller in there praying.

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I guest praying was about all they'd got left to do. War's hell, all right . . . sure is . . . but I can tell you one thing, a flood like this one's a damn sight meaner in its way! Yesterday I seen a whole cemetery up here washed out . . . dead folks washed out o' their graves . . . say, I'll say it, even war's decenter 'n that!"

"It must o' been the whole of an hour," said Cole, eager to pick up his story again, "after we first saw them, before we sighted those kids again.

"Wallace dropped down as far as he dared. I went wild. I kept yelling at him he'd simply got to make a landing. He couldn't hear a word above that eternal roar. But I guess it didn't make any difference. Only difference was he knew what it was going to be . . . landing where there wasn't any landing-place. For about five seconds more I was ignorant . . . *now I know!*

"Gosh! we didn't do a thing but rip across that field! But, as Wallace was saying afterward, what could you do? Two nervy little guys sticking to the sharp side of a signboard with a damn runaway river waiting to suck them off!

"They were about half drowned when we got 'em, but they began beating it over to the plane. They told us they were brothers, running away from school somewhere . . . some wedding or something they wanted to be in at.

"Best thing to do seemed to be to get the kids off out of this flood area to some place where they could be taken care of. They piled into the cockpit fast

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enough. I put my coat round them. You ought to've seen the look of Christmas on their faces when they found out they were going to get a chance to hop off! Wallace got in. She tipped round a while, then she took off.

"One queer thing . . . when I turned round and was looking back at the signboard. It was just toppling over . . . one end down under water, but you could read two words in big letters on the up end, 'EXTRA DRY!' Then over she went, and went racing off downstream.

"I came along down here, trying to get some pictures of the flood. This place is an island . . . you can see from back there on that hill . . . the water's broken through over there on that other side. Wallace said I could go if I wanted to, but he wasn't going to come back . . . he wasn't going to be any such fool as to risk landing round here again. But I know Wallace all right. . . . I'm keeping my ear peeled. . . ."

"Well, git busy." Ed Bean spoke up with his deep, even voice. He went down the bank and climbed into the boat.

Cole started briskly after him. Pete put him back with a hand. "Four's all this boat's going to hold . . . out there in that boiling ice-box. You're wetter'n hell . . . no coat. Go on up; get the Widder Kublic to moisten your whistle . . . right in her line."

At this gibe of Cronin's, delivered with a wink, the good humor died from Tony's face. He blushed hotly.

"Great stuff . . . sure is!" said Pete, trying to cover

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his blunder tactfully. "And all I can say is I take off my hat to *her* all right. She's got about the worst bunch o' misery on her hands . . . two rooms full up with women and kids and hens and dogs. One having a kid on her and another one dying in the same bed. Gee! but what I'd like to know is, *why the dogs?*"

"Is that the house up there that that sick woman that was rescued 's in?" asked Cole.

"Yep . . . Zalinska woman," answered Pete. "She ain't what you'd call a good-looker . . . kinda large-looking . . . kind of a Juno or Niobe or something . . . you know . . . I never could tell them goddess people apart."

"When we was gitting her up there," drawled Bean, "she kept asking wasn't I a priest."

"Gee! What do you know. . . ?" laughed Pete.

"She seems to be thinking she's got some red-hot sin clamping onto her soul," stated Bean.

"What she's got is a smashed-up leg and a pain shooting in through her ribs. Priest? Gosh! What *she* needs is a wrecker!" said Pete.

"Seems to be something about some cussing she's done that's eating her," said Bean.

"You can't get much o' anything out o' the men over there," said Pete, pointing toward the fire, "but near's I could make out this Zalinska female was running on all right 'fore this struck her. Like all them Polacks, working like a dog and having babies like a rabbit.

"Gee! but there's something eating the old girl now," continued Pete. "Hanging onto my hand . . . got the

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clinch of a blacksmith. That son-in-law she's been living with (skunk that sneaked off, leaving her and the kids to drown), she seems to be making out he's got it in for her more'n she's got it in for him. Maybe I wasn't getting it straight . . . she was talking Polish . . . Mrs. Kublic handing it out second-hand. Wobblenski's beating it, way he done, is all right, but her letting her lip off after him, way she done, is hitting in below the belt.

"Well, go on along up," Pete concluded, motioning to start Cole. "Just putting you wise . . . the old lady is nuts."

Bean and Cronin and Kublic were in the boat, Cole hesitating on the bank. Ed Bean reached for an oar. He was puzzling in his mind over Jozefa Zalinska, rescued from the terrors of death after two days and nights in the flood, lying up there now, safe in bed on dry land, yet torturing herself with remorse.

"Well, I guest nothing never happened so bad but what some fool woman could think up some way o' making it worst." Ed Bean pronounced this soberly. Then he pushed off with the oar.

Chapter Five

JOZEFA lay in the house of Mary Kublic. It was up a hill. The hands of the water could not reach it. There was a great fever upon her. Pain ate at her bones.

The hut was crowded full of women and children. Jozefa lay on the one bed. On the other half of the same bed Stella Jawuska had just given birth to a child. In the last of her agony she'd screamed for Father O'Keefe. She'd feared her child would die before it was baptized. She was smiling and happy now with her boy on her arm. Her man was away in Chicopee, working in the mill. They said this new-born child was going to live. No one had told her yet that her six older children were drowned.

Mary Kublic moved nimbly about. She was small and shriveled. She still wore the finery put on two days ago for the wedding of Michalina—a full-skirted embroidered dress brought from the homeland, a soiled white headsquare, a stringy red apron. She moved with a joyless energy, her shoulders bent, a set smile on her wrinkled face. There was wistfulness, but no gaiety to the Widow Kublic's smile.

GUILT

Twelve women, three times as many children, cats, dogs, and hens were all refugees in Mary Kublic's hut. They sprawled about in the two small adjoining rooms.

Here was shelter and warmth. The women sat on the floor, their backs to the wall. They were silent. The only words came from Mary Zaluka. The Zalukis' house had been swept away. Their fields were under water. Two of their children were drowned.

Mary Zaluka sat flat on the floor, her fat legs straight out before her. Her eyes were shut, her round head with its stringy light hair thrown back. She grasped her elbows with her hands and rocked herself from side to side, moaning in English: "My funny-ture! My funny-ture!" All her furniture that she had bought from the mail-order house was gone. She had waited so long to buy. Kitchen cabinets and oak bedroom sets are so much rarer, so much more difficult to procure, than Polish babies. "My funny-ture! O Got! My funny-ture!"

Jozefa lay on the bed. She prepared herself for the grave. She longed for her brother, for Stanislaw Sadwinski. She called for him by name. She longed to speak to him by means of a letter, to inform him of this greatest disaster.

The banns had been called. The feast had been blessed in the hall. It was on Thursday. It was on November 3rd. It was on the wedding day of Michalina that the floods came.

Stamped on Jozefa's eyes was a terrible sight. The flood had come down the valley. With her eyes she

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saw it come; high as a church, raging; houses, whole trees in its teeth. There was a crash as if a mountain had fallen. Stones great as cows were hurled on top of the water. Horror had filled up her eyes.

Their house had been swept away. They'd been washed into the water. Water choked them and froze up their bones. Jozefa thought they were dead. She thought they were forsaken by God. But God sent a house down the river. There were lights like eyes in the house. Smoke came out of its mouth like a dragon. Leon had cried out from fear of that house.

In pushing Leon up to the window Jozefa's leg had been crushed. Stanley had pulled her in. All night they lay in the house. All day the water was rising. Stanley threw himself out of the window. He caught hold of a hencoop and floated away before dark. If God spared him she could not know. She had cursed him because he tried to save his own life. She had cursed him that he left his sons to die, the sons of Stasia. (God's will be done!)

She had cursed him. God have mercy, she had cursed him! She, Jozefa Zalinska, who had never cursed before.

Jozefa now heard a loud knocking. She heard Mary Kublic open the door. There was a man, a stranger. He named himself "Reporter." Reporter? thought Jozefa. Some kind of prince, perhaps, of America. He'd come from Boston on wings. From Boston? That is a long way. He stepped into the house carefully over the children and dogs. He was young and slim, with thin

GUILT

cheeks. A shiny leather cap clung over his ears. He leaned over Jozefa. There was a smell of freshness and dampness about him. Jozefa prayed that he might be a priest. "I wished to goodness I was a doctor," he said.

The Kostrebi children pulled at his knees. He fed them candy from his pocket. But there wasn't enough to go round.

The Reporter took out a paper and pencil. He questioned Mary Zaluka and Mary Kostreba about the flood. The women sat on the floor. Their hands were idle under their aprons. They refused speech. They had nothing to say.

This young man had no Polish. But Mary Kublic was able to speak English. It was fortunate. God had blessed her. She was possessed of two tongues.

Mary stood by the kitchen table. She spoke in English. She told this young Reporter the story of the flood. He sat at the table and wrote it all down.

Mary Kublic had come out of her house. It was early in the morning. It was Thursday, and she had stood by the door. All night the rain had been heavy. Now it had ceased. Mary had started down the hill toward the store. Her children had run about her. They had shouted and spattered the mud.

Tony had come in the delivery auto. He had come swiftly. He had honked with the voice of a bull. He'd called to them without stopping. They must run to make themselves safe. A great flood would come down from the mountain. It would sweep the valley. A moment only and it would be here. They had time only to

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run back up the hill. He must push down the road to warn others. His wheels threw up the mud. He was gone.

Mary had run back up the hill to this house. She'd called to her children. She'd tried to save the feather bed. She'd tried to save the stove. She'd looked out of the window.

Water jumped halfway up the hill. The shouts of men, the crash of houses, the thunder of water filled up her ears. She saw horses, men, cows, pigs, chickens, turning and twisting, ground by the flood.

There was no time, there was no priest to carry the Sacrament about them, to hold off the curse, to keep back the water.

She thought, "Tony will drown," and her heart seemed torn from her. Surely the water would wash out his life!

Now today was Saturday, and the water went down. They could see only ruin, and deep mud over all, and the branches of trees. "Holiest Virgin," cried Mary Kublic, "what have I lived to see! All the houses down by the river under water, heaped boards and stoves, dead fowls and the carcasses of cows, my neighbors homeless and sick!"

Of twenty homes in Harry's Mill only two remained. Her house, thanks to the Holiest Virgin, was one of the saved. God had spared it, together with one other, the house of the Gutfinskis, which was next door. They were back from the river on high ground, they were not washed away.

GUILT

But how to pluck sound from the ears! How to wipe sight from the eyes!

"And not our people, not this place only," said Mary Kublic, "but the whole of Vermont is washed away. How can I thank the Lord God that my house still stands?"

The Milesbrough Road had been washed out. It had caved in on Friday. Nobody could come through from Milesbrough to help them. Jozefa kept calling for Father O'Keefe. It would be a miracle . . . he would have to have wings to get here before death.

Yes, Milesbrough was the nearest town, Mary Kublic said, it was three miles, and uphill all the way. Yes, Milesbrough might perhaps be saved, but since Friday they hadn't heard. The road was gone. It would be years, if ever, before help could come from outside. And during those years, God help them! for they had fire, a few fowls, but no bread.

The children fretted and teased. They refused to go out to play because they were hungry. Those were Mary Kostreba's, Mary Kublic pointed out, and this was their dog. These were Mary Zaluka's. She had lost two in the flood. The dogs snarled. It was impossible to walk without stepping on hands or paws.

"We can only wait and pray God," sighed Mary Kublic. "The Lord God has spared me my son. He is down by the river. They are looking for bodies."

The young Reporter offered to write a letter for Jozefa to her brother. He would write it in English. Jozefa could dictate it in Polish to Mary Kublic. Mary

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Kublic could turn it into English so that it could be written down.

And so it was by the mouth of Mary Kublic who never saw his face that they were forced to send Stanislaw Sadwinski such sadness. By the mouth of Mary Kublic and by the hand of a stranger he would learn how his sister, Jozefa Zalinska, was no longer for this world. In this clumsy way the letter to Stanislaw Sadwinski was brought forth.

The young Reporter promised to take the letter back with him when he flew to Boston. He had no wings. It was a miracle how he could fly. Yet he promised to send the letter, although Jozefa had no stamp.

Yes, there would be some one in Lovna who could read it. Jan Sulewski had gone back. He had been long in America, near Pittsburgh. He would be able to read the English to Stanislaw and tell him how they had suffered, how the waters had washed them away.

“Harry’s Mill, November 5, 1927

“When you read, brother, send money. Send 100, send 200 rubles. Send such money as you can. Mortgage the land and send swiftly. The land is not wholly yours. I die alone. God pity! What can I do? There is no money for the Holy Mass or the candles.

“Dear brother: How can I send you this news? A thousand tongues could not tell our disaster. A terrible flood has drowned this land as if it was spit from the devil. God took away His hand. The heavens dropped. The river rose an ocean. Of a sudden it was here.

GUILT

"The store is under water, and the fields. How can any one work?"

"Many lie dead and sick. Those that live we know not where they are. The Staszkos. Their house is washed away. We know not if any are left of this world. Yesterday they found the body of Mary Slambowska.

"Michalina. Michalina is not married. I know not where she is. Where is Peter? Where is Leon? He was not strong. Likely he is dead while I write.

"And Stanley Wobblenski, my son-in-law who sheltered me, where is he? They do not answer when I ask.

"My children are gone. My cow is drowned. All that was for my old age is washed away. There is no money to bury me here in this foreign land. Send money, brother, send swiftly. My soul sits in hell. My breath is almost gone.

"Your sister, Jozefa Zalinska."

A moment after he finished writing this letter, the young Reporter stiffened back in his chair. He listened intently. A faint whirring sound was coming from outside; then the steadily increasing drone of an airplane. Cole got up, a grin on his face. "Ah-ha-a!" he said. "My master's voice!"

He folded Jozefa's dictation and put it in his pocket. He leaned over Jozefa. He patted her shoulder. He waved to Mary Kublic, and was gone.

The hot stuffy hut seemed very still after this breezy

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exit. The women sighed faintly. They turned their heads and shifted their heavy feet.

One would have said it was the penetrating dampness from outside, if it had not been impossible for any chill to survive the heat of the stove and the warmth from these human bodies. No, it was some eerie penetration, some subtle mental miasma issuing from the consciousness of these assembled hags. You might have guessed it was the haunting terror left in their minds from their late experiences, but it was something less personal than this, and of a deeper, more cumulative interest than any personal experience however tragic. It was knowledge that evil had been done, that conscious power for wrong had been exercised by one near them in this house.

Eyes turn constantly toward the bed in the inner room where Jozefa lies. Every woman in the hut is shuddering inwardly at this unspeakable thing Jozefa Zalinska has done. An evil wish as soon as it is spoken gets out of hand. It is no longer in the control of its propounder any more than an onion in growing consults the hand that placed its seed-ball in the soil. In other words, Jozefa, having cursed her benefactor, is not able now to take it back. If Wobblenski is dead the curse will rebound on Jozefa. Only God has power to negative a curse. And He is apt to charge a high price for His services. What price can a poor woman pay, a woman who has just been washed bare by a flood?

Ed Bean pushed off with the oar. Pete and Tony

GUILT

rowed the boat out from the shore. In the middle of the stream the current was violent. They were whirled away down the river, round the bend, and almost hurled on some rocks.

For several hours no call had come from Wobblenski. When Tony climbed out on the rocks he found him, waving his arms above his head. He looked at Tony; his eyes didn't know him. He was mad, wildly mad. He'd waited alone all night, cold and wet, shut in by the fog. The water seemed rising. He'd waited alone to be drowned.

Early that morning, when the raft of four coffins broke up, three of the boxes had whirled downstream in the fog. They'd swept round the bend in the river, they'd plunged up on the rocks where Wobblenski was. They came on him suddenly out of the fog. They lunged at him out of the mist, three coffins there at his feet.

"Three corpses hung about your neck while you live, Wobblenski! Three corpses strung about your soul when you are gone!" He saw the three coffins leap out of the mist. They ramped like wolves at his feet. They gleamed their wet yellow wood. He remembered that ghastly curse. Such a horror was in his soul. Reason left his head.

Wobblenski struggled against the men. They were forced to overpower him. His body felt to their hands like a man carved of ice. He fought. He bit like a dog. They were forced to bind him with ropes. They put

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him in the bottom of the boat with his legs under a thwart. They rowed back toward the shore.

Wobblenski beat about and bruised himself. The heaving of his body nearly overturned the boat. It threatened their lives. Finally they got him ashore. With difficulty the three men carried him along the slippery bank. They laid him on a stretcher in one of the tents. They cut the ropes that held him. They stripped him and rolled him in blankets warmed by the fire. For a time he lay limp. At night he began to rave. He burned with fever.

All night Tony sat on his chest. The others sat on his legs.

Wobblenski tossed and swore. "Peter," he croaked. "Leon. The old woman. Three dead ones strung about my soul!"

They told him Peter lived. They told him Leon lived. They told him Jozefa was not yet of the dead. He heard their words, without taking them in.

Reason never came back into Stanley Wobblenski. Toward morning, either from the cunning of the insane or from the weakness of the sick, he lay still for a time. They grew careless how they guarded him. When there was only Ed Bean left with him in the tent, Wobblenski broke out into a paroxysm of fear. With Jozefa's curse heavy in his ears, with the sight of three coffins burning in his eyes, Ed couldn't hold him. He couldn't stop him. Wobblenski ran down the bank. In the cold gray of Sunday morning he threw himself back into the river and was drowned.

Part VI: Gifts

Chapter One

IT WAS a crisp, white, glistening day, that 26th of December. All but one from Mary Kublic's crowded hut had returned that morning to brisk work or eager play. Ah, the joyous holiday season! There was a spring in each toe. In the stomach was plenty of food. A snap in the air filled out the lungs and made the heart pump with energy. Just to be alive in Harry's Mill in this winter of 1927 was enough to be thankful for.

Only Jozefa was forced to be idle. Now had come for her those hard days of convalescence when one begins to wonder if, after all, it was God's blessing one was saved. She was up, out of bed, wrapped in an old overcoat. She had hobbled on crutches across the room, and was sitting by the east window. Steam from cooking melted the frost from the glass, so that curves of silver ice clung only in the corners, while water ran down the black centers of the panes.

All the children and dogs of the village were out-of-doors, crunching over the snow. They'd made a sled-slide down the slope east from Mary Kublic's house

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toward the river. Jozefa wiped dry a spot on the glass and watched them through the window. A thick tangle of shouts and quarrels, cut by the sharp barking of dogs, filled up the ears.

Mary Kublic hummed thinly as she boiled pork and cabbage in the adjoining kitchen. It was already eleven o'clock. The dinner hour pushed closely upon her.

The odor of steaming cabbage was pleasant in the nostrils. Jozefa was content to sit idle, but her mind fretted itself with practical thoughts. The pressure of living that ceased during her illness now pushed back into her mind faster than energy returned to her body. How to live with everything gone? The dead who were drowned seemed now to have the best of it. When one's home and means of earning are washed away, is it not better to go after them?

By the mercy of God Jozefa was well. Her eyes were filled by Peter and Leon. Michalina was now here. They'd reached Milesbrough safely on that Friday of the great flood before the road went down. They'd slept for many nights with others in the town hall. Milesbrough stands on high ground, back from the river. It was not washed away. Michalina and the boys ate up the feast that was for the wedding of Wobblenski. Afterward they were given food by the Red Cross. Each day a feast day! Michalina and Peter and Leon were well cared for. In this country there is plenty. Even Leon's health favored him.

As for Jamie and Richard, they had run away, last November, from "Industrial." It was the first time

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that they had run away. They'd started out from the school on the Thursday of the flood. Jozefa had written them about the wedding. They'd longed to be present at the feast. They were hungry. They had tasted continually that pork and cabbage in their mouths. They'd started at midnight and followed along the course of the river. On Saturday they'd been swept into the flood. It carried them almost to death. They caught hold of a signboard. It was the goodness of God they were saved.

Tony Kublic had been the first to get through to Milesbrough. He'd started on the Monday after the flood. When he came back he'd brought Jozefa two letters; one from Jamie, one from Richard. They'd been written at "Industrial," to dictation, in English. Tony had read them out loud.

"Sunday, November 6

"Hi, ma, we're back here to school!" Jamie's letter said. "Bet you didn't know we was loose. We ain't got no kick against this burg. There's a workshop with lots o' tools. You can have lots o' nails to your pants.

"Some guys and I was making an airplane . . . the boss lets us. Richard claimed he was helping. He wanted to get a ride in her when we got her to working. We thought we'd get her to working and hop off for home, but we didn't get her to working. That pork and stuff! Gee! ma, there ain't no weddings to this burg. I took Richard along. We beat it.

"All of a suddink the road lets down and dumps us

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into the water. Looks like we was drowned or something. But you better bet hanging onto that signboard was roses when we seen that airplane guy heading our way!

"Geel! ma, you oughter seen those school guys standing round with their eyes peeled watching us land!

"Richard's a scared baby.

"The guy that's boss to this burg ain't licked us none. He's got us to bed, here to the infirmary.

"Say, ma, that airplane guy says he's coming back up here some day to give us another. Say, he's a regular guy!

"Your loving son, Jamie Zalinski."

Richard's letter was shorter.

"Dear ma, Jamie says I'm a baby. He says I cried to the plane. I ain't a baby. I couldn't get my teeth shut. It was something awful to your ears. I was kinda scared.

"The nurse is making us write you a letter. The other guys are looking in the windows. They think we're Lindys. It's great staying in bed, having eats!

"Richard."

The boys had run away from the school in order to be present at the wedding. For two days they'd had nothing to eat. Seeking a feast, they found hunger. It was the mercy of God they were not washed down in the flood.

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Now they'd given their promise they'd never again run away, never again leave that good school. The guy-that-was-boss-to-that-burg had written this to Jozefa. But what, after all, was a promise given by Jamie and come from his lips?

Little Katherine still wore a black dress and sang with God's Sisters. She was content. The hand of God had held back the water from Chicopee-Mass. There had been flood there, but not much. In November, when Jozefa lay sick, Katherine had written her mother. "If you die, dear mamma, I can pray for you good. I live so close to the saints." Through days and nights of suffering Jozefa had held fast to this letter, crushed and smudged by the heat of her hand.

But during all these weeks since the flood no word had come from the homeland, no answer to that letter penned by the Reporter in English. "Reporter," mused Jozefa. She remembered his height, the thin length of his cheeks, his smile, his kind touch, and the cost of his boots! Reporter? . . . Yes, that would mean prince . . . some prince, perhaps, of the nobility of Vermont . . . some young prince of America.

Jozefa had now waited two months. No answer had come from her brother. In those days when Death stood near, when he leaned over and stabbed with a knife through her breast, Jozefa would question with her eyes, though she was unable to speak. Tony'd tiptoe in every day, trying to hush the noise of his thick boots, his boyish face awed, anxious. A letter? Tony could only

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shake his head. But it was he who'd understood, all those weeks, how Jozefa longed for that letter.

Two months and no letter. Jozefa longed for it still. It wasn't only the money. There was no immediate need, Jozefa knew, for those prayers. But she longed to hold in her hands a message from Poland, from the home province, from Lovna where two of her children lay buried, where she'd left her father and brother behind; some greeting from that brother with whom she'd walked as a girl, his hand in hers. A disappointing letter, perhaps; a sad, an evading, even a whining one; yet it would have been a letter from the homeland; from out the envelope some breath of Polish air would have come into her lungs.

Sound of shrill voices now brought Jozefa's thoughts back to the children. She looked out of the window.

"'S my turn! 'S my turn! 'S my turn!" Leon Wobblenski's cry rose in crescendo. He was the youngest, only four. Nobody in the noisy group took note of his wrongs except Jeddy, who ran up to the boy and sniffed of his chapped hands with a long sharp nose. Finally the dog turned away, unable to puzzle it all out in his big benevolent heart. What was Leon's distress all about? Why did nobody pay any attention to him? Then the temptation to rollic laid hold of Jeddy's legs. Off he scampered with three other dogs, barking after a flying sled that whizzed down the slope. The collie tore along with his cur companions, his small head down, his ears back, his great shoulder muscles strain-

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ing, the tawny ruff on his neck bristling. Short sharp barks of sport rang out among the scant hillside trees.

After a moment or two Jeddy returned to again investigate poor Leon's woe, with head hanging and many apologetic bows and wags; shamed that he could have so forgotten loyalty as to leave him. Jeddy alone of all the gang was cognizant of Leon's distress. He came fawning to the feet of the boy, disturbed in spirit. He appealed to the other heedless ones with questioning eyes.

Jozefa turned from the window and sighed. Some quality in Leon's voice brought remembrance. The boy's wan face and perpetual complainings recalled another boy, a motherless boy who had clung to Jozefa's hand when he was a child long ago. Yes, Leon was like Stanislaw. That fretting voice with its peevish insistence on rights that nobody heeded, it held a power that pulled at the heart.

Jozefa closed her eyes. She was worn by worries. She dozed a little there in her chair by the window. Odorous steam from boiling cabbage made the room warm. The shouts and barkings outside melted to silence in Jozefa's ears. Her head nodded forward. Even the near sound of Mary Kublic's humming seemed far away. It reached Jozefa only in a dream.

Little Jozefa Sadwinska and her twin brother Stanislaw were walking demurely, hand in hand, through the crooked street of Lovna to the church; thickly clad, clumsy, little figures with the pure joy of the Christmas season in their hearts. Ah, the wonder of the lighted

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church, the sweetness of the sleeping Jesus, the green of the boughs, the smoke and odor of incense, the singing, the friendly neighbors, the rich organ melody stirring the heart! All the pumping excitement of childhood, all the hot flickerings of its ecstasy, were relit in old Jozefa's somber soul.

She woke up with these sensations vivid within her; a feeling of nearness to the homeland, a sense of childhood's perpetual romance lingering on to make her heart glad.

It was noon. Jozefa sat by the east window in the bedroom, content, while her bowl of hot pork and cabbage was brought to her by Tony. If she had opened her lips to speak she would have told him of a miraculous journey she had just taken back to a colder, crisper land where in the heart of two children, long ago, the Christmas spirit of awe and joy burned like a candle and a star.

Jozefa didn't speak, though she felt Tony would have understood. But at that moment a hungry brood of little Americans came stamping into the cabin and jostled around the table. If they'd heard her tell, some one of them (Marylka, likely, that oldest, darkest Kublic girl) would have pointed her finger meaningly to her forehead and push out her mouth.

They hurled themselves to the table, helter-skelter, and sat down, shoving and scraping the boxes; none of the gentle Old World stolidness and calm, the father standing at the head of the table, each child silent with

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folded hands while the little Lord Jesus blessed the food.

Mary Kublic, worried and hard-working, busies herself between table and stove, dishing up cabbage in steaming bowlfuls. More food for each one than a whole family had when Jozefa was a child.

Jozefa leaned forward a little in her chair. She could look far enough into the next room to see Tony smiling broadly at one end of the table. Michalina sat, fair and serene, by his side. The four dark-skinned Kublic girls and Peter and Leon were packed, some two on a box, along the sides of the table. Such mouth-stuffing, such sucking and smacking, such loud disputing, such rib-punching and banter! "Leggo! Leggo! Say, you leggo!" Little Leon still unnoticed, still pleading for his rights.

Nobody paid any attention to him except Jeddy, who, curled up under the table amid the savory odors, never thought of pushing forward the cause of his personal hunger, but who at every bellow from Leon pricked up a delicate ear.

When Jozefa had finished half of her cabbage she had had enough. She let the spoon rest in the bowl, the bowl rest on her big knees. Her eyes looked out of the window toward the east. Down at the foot of the small hill on which the Kublic cottage stood, Harry's Mill again lighted its noon-time fires. The Red Cross had built a row of wooden huts along where the street used to be. Now out of drain-tile chimneys thin columns of blue smoke wavered up through the sparkling air. The sound of hammers rang. Men sawed and pounded.

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Jozefa could hear it faintly. She could catch a glimpse of yellow wood gleaming in the sun.

Jozefa was cut off by trees from sight of Wobblenski's Point. But tomorrow she and Michalina and Peter and Leon were to move away from Mary Kublic's hut and into a home of their own. Tony had explained it to Jozefa; Wobblenski's house was washed away; there was another house being prepared for her. But in her mind Jozefa was quite unable to picture it. Try as she would she could picture on Wobblenski's land only the house of Wobblenski as it had been before the flood, that three-roomed, one-story, good-enough house, that house Michalina had scorned.

Cold terror gripped Jozefa even now in the warm light of midday, at thought of ever re-entering the house of Wobblenski. All the horrors of the flood, all the disaster caused by her curse seemed to stir and bruise in her brain at thought of going down tomorrow to that house that awaited them.

Jozefa forced herself to say it over. "The house of Wobblenski is gone. The Red Cross (God keep it!) prepares us another." What power have words against emotion? Jozefa could see in her mind only the house of Wobblenski. She could not force herself to believe that she'd enter tomorrow into any other dwelling. Her heart swelled with repulsion . . . to live in the house of Wobblenski . . . to receive again shelter from one she had cursed! Ah, Holiest Virgin, the memories, the remorse that would crowd with them through the door! The house would be for Jozefa no better than a tomb.

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And how she and Michalina and Peter and Leon were to live . . . poor Jozefa's weakened mind could not figure it out. Some way they must live . . . some way. They were to go. Tony had said it. Mary Kublic herself took it for granted, and mentioned their going with a tired sigh. But thought of leaving Mary Kublic's warm house and patient care brought tears of intense distress and homesickness to Jozefa's eyes.

Michalina would now be forced back into the laundry in Milesbrough in order to keep the beast from the door. This plan Jozefa had thought out laboriously in her head. As yet she had said nothing of it to Michalina, and Michalina had certainly said nothing to her mother about going back to work in the laundry.

During these long weeks of Jozefa's illness Michalina had helped Mary Kublic graciously, a little condescendingly, with the housework. She was more beautiful than ever, her skin a finer pink, her hands more slender, her eyes more sparkling, her little red mouth less likely to pout, more ready to smile. Ah, she was a dainty flower to have blossomed on so coarse a stem!

Michalina was even gracious to her mother, though she did little of the nursing, willingly leaving that to Mary Kublic's practiced hands. But to have sight only of Michalina's loveliness was medicine.

As for Tony, he was Michalina's slave. He would put his arm around her with the gentle reverence one feels toward an image of the Virgin rather than the boisterous joy of a lover.

In time, doubtless, Tony Kublic would marry Mich-

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lina Zalinska. But where was the living to come from? Tony helped with the support of his mother and sisters. To be sure, he had now a good-enough job while it lasted. He ran the auto-truck of Pete Cronin between Milesbrough and Harry's Mill, carrying lumber and supplies for the carpenters. But soon the rebuilding would cease. Such as were left in Harry's Mill had shelter now against the cold; two rooms to each family, and a tin roof, and in these days one thanked the Lord God on one's knees if anything approaching a roof covered one's head.

Tony drove the truck for Pete Cronin. Pete was the shorter of those two men who had come in the boat through the fog that Saturday morning, last November, and helped Tony save Jozefa from the flood. Jozefa remembered clearly and with such reverence as one recalls the image of a saint, that thick short body, those waddling legs, that red bloated face above many chins, the little piglike eyes, the kind squeaky voice, and the tender pat of that steel-fingered hand. Uncouth image of memory, how often she had blessed it in her heart!

Michalina was happy. She spent most of each day riding on the high seat of the truck beside Tony. But when this job for Pete Cronin was finished, where would Tony find work? Jozefa'd asked him that question and he had grinned. "They got to get the road built," he had told her. "It's a crime using that punk détour." But Mary Kublic had heard there was no chance that they'd rebuild the Milesbrough road before spring.

Such annoyances as she had experienced during a long

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illness in the home of another now dropped from the mind of Jozefa and were forgotten: the insinuations and pointings of the Kublic girls (they slept on mattresses on the floor, while Tony slept in the cowshed), the endless whinings of little Leon provoked by the indifference and unkindness of the others. Mary Kublic was normally good-natured, but often of late, with all the extra work put upon her by the numerous visitors in her home (although all had now gone out except Jozefa and her family), and with the fatigue of nursing her old friend, she had grown short of speech. Repeatedly she'd slapped Peter and Leon out of her way.

Tomorrow they must go on. Jozefa argued it out with herself, sitting by the east window, as the moisture stiffened over the panes and the afternoon grew toward dusk. She and Michalina, together with the boys, tomorrow they must go on. A feeling of faintness and sickness came over Jozefa. She shrank physically from the exertion of moving. She had not set foot out of this room since she had been carried in here from the flood. Almost two months. Jozefa shivered at thought of venturing out-of-doors for the first time on her untrustworthy legs; she dreaded having to again use her flabby body and weakened will.

Wobblenski. They had no need to tell her Wobblenski was dead. Whenever dusk settled over the land she could hear him, a tortured spirit, moaning over the river, forever keening in the wind, forever rising in the mist. Jozefa thought with dread of having to live where

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she'd be forced to look out on the river, the tomb of her son-in-law whom she'd wronged. Jozefa knew: morning and night, his spirit clung to that place where her curse had come to his ears. Wobblenski's soul condemned by her tongue to linger forever between earth and hell, accursed, fearfully accursed.

The sun had sunk down. The early darkness of winter began to settle over the land. From the south the wind rose with a sob. There was a tingling of terror through Jozefa's scalp. A cry like a homeless bird's came to her over the river; the river, thick, black, swift, remorseless; the river that had tasted her sin.

Sweat sprang out on Jozefa's body. She called Mary Kublic. No answer. Jozefa tried to rise, but she seemed bound to her chair. She called again. She was alone in the darkened house.

Soon after, Mary Kublic pushed in from the shed with a load of firewood in her arms. In the dark she tripped over Jeddy, stretched out on the floor full-length and luxurious, in front of the stove. Mary caught herself from falling by slamming the wood down on the stove-top with a dreadful clatter. She turned and kicked angrily at Jeddy, who retreated, yawning, into a corner. "Blood of a brute!" Mary Kublic spoke in Polish. Mary, the gentle, the enduring one. She spoke angrily as one whose strength and patience have ebbed.

"We must go on," thought Jozefa. "Tomorrow we must go on. We have lain long and heavily upon the back of a friend. I had thought there might be an end

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to the mildness of the Virgin, but none to the goodness of Mary Kublic. We have worn her out with sickness and care. With long standing the sweetest milk sours." Thus Jozefa tried to deceive herself in regard to Mary Kublic, but in her heart she knew how Mary condemned her. She had cursed the soul of another. With her lips she had bitterly cursed the soul of Wobblenski.

Jozefa knew that to the mind of Mary Kublic Wobblenski was no suicide. He had not taken his own life by his own will. It had been power from Jozefa's tongue tearing like a devil within him that had forced him to death. Furthermore, Jozefa had pronounced a curse upon his soul. Only God can negative a curse. One is not permitted to approach God except through the prayers of the saints. And where was money to come from with which to purchase those prayers?

Mary Kublic now came into the sick-room and snapped on the electric light. There was a smile on her wizened lips that looked as if her tongue tasted sour. She sat down on the edge of a chair. By the end of the day she was too bent in body, too beaten in spirit, to hearten her guest. "That brother of yours, that Sadwinski of Lovna"—she spoke bitterly and in Polish—"how greed and dishonesty breed in his heart! He sends no money."

Jozefa was silent. She was again driven in thought back toward the homeland, but this time no feeling of joy, no sense of childhood's romance, danced out to meet her and make her heart glad.

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"Tomorrow you'll go down." Mary's tongue was thin and listless. "You'll go down to your new house."

Yes, tomorrow they would go down. Jozefa wiped her palm nervously across her dry lips.

It was true. Tomorrow they'd go down, as Mary Kublic said, to that new house. But she had failed to mention how fear would descend with them.

After Mary Kublic went out of the room, Jozefa reached for a pad of paper and a pencil that Tony had brought her. She began to write in Polish the first letter that she'd written since the flood with her own hand.

"Harry's Mill, December 1927

"Dear Brother: I informed you in last November of a great disaster.

"The flood rose to the house-tops; our house, our hens, our cows were washed away. A young Reporter came. He flew on wings from the sky. It was by the hand of this Reporter that I spoke to you in English. Was no one able to read? Was it written in words no one could understand?

"No answer came. How much of this world is swept away! Has disaster visited you? Is Lovna washed by flood? Are you, my brother, washed from this world?

"Is it because I cursed? Is it because I killed with my tongue that God guides not the hand of my brother to write me a letter?

"It is true I asked for money. I even mentioned a mortgage. Now I urge you in haste, think no further

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of a mortgage. A mortgage rubs like a shoe. How can you mortgage when our father forbade it? And my need no longer presses, my greatest need, the need for Masses, the prayers for my soul when I am gone.

"Weeks have passed on since that day of disaster, that wedding day of Wobblenski when the floods came. I have lain long in this house of Mary Kublic. At first she refused to tell of Wobblenski. Twice she summoned Father O'Keefe for the last office. She is a good woman. She asks nothing, she gives much. She has the good face of a saint. She kept the windows of her house shut. She kept my blood warm. The sickness in my chest passed because of her. I inform you how it is alone by the goodness of Mary Kublic that I draw breath.

"The road was gone. They were unable to get help from Milesbrough. Finally after five days they were able to come.

"On the Saturday of the flood when they left me in this house of Mary Kublic, Tony together with two men went back to Wobblenski. They found him, but he had gone mad from my curse.

"If he threw himself out into the flood to save his own life, he did but God's bidding. Yet I cursed him. God have mercy, how I cursed him; I, Jozefa Zalinska, who had never cursed before!

"Wobblenski is gone, the house of Wobblenski, the store. The fields are washed bare. How can anyone work? How am I able to rejoice that breath is left in my throat?

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"Dear brother: I live only for woe. My curse returns upon me. It returns upon my own head. It haunts me so that I am guilty at night. And Holiest Virgin pity me, for I am guilty by day! Pray for me, little Katherine! Press yourself nearer to the saints. . . !"

Chapter Two

THE next day, after breakfast, Jozefa sat in the kitchen, waiting for Tony to come with the truck and take her to her new home. Such a feeling of movement and change in the air! The excited calls of the children, the sharp barks of Jeddy, who sensed new happenings.

Jozefa sat trembling, first hot then cold from weakness. She was wrapped in such clothing as was left to her: a cotton dress, a man's worn overcoat, a headshawl of baby-pink wool about her coarse features, a blanket wrapped around her great limbs. Jozefa's face was the color of putty. She scowled. The apprehension of the weak and sick, of whom it is now expected that they will act like the well, pressed on her mind as on a sore. Her large hands clutched her crutches as if they alone would help her weakness. She sat by the east window in Mary Kublic's kitchen where the morning sun made dazzling the frosted panes. The light was too bright for her weak eyes. She could swallow nothing. Mary Kublic urged her to drink warm tea.

The children rushed about the two rooms. They

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reveled in the sense of the unusual. They played with it as with a ball. Today Mary Kublic was patient. Peter backed into her and made her spill the warm tea. No word of reproof from Mary Kublic. As she went about the work of the house she was forced to push Leon aside. No word of crossness or reproach, no cuffing or slapping. Today there was indeed change in the air, a feeling of moving on, a satisfying sense of consummation that lifted each one pleasantly out of himself.

Michalina had tied up their few possessions, little better than rags, in a bundle, and set it by Jozefa. At Jozefa's feet sat Jeddy, not in repose, but with every muscle taut, his one overpowering anxiety lest he be left behind, lest he be separated from his trust, lest in some way he fail those that were given him to adore. He pressed closer to Jozefa's feet. He mustn't relax for a second. With this smell of change in the air no contingency should find him off duty. He'd had a hearty breakfast, an unusual treat given him by Mary Kublic. The kitchen was warm. His fur coat was heavy. Jeddy nodded sleepily. A morning nap? No. He straightened himself on his haunches, setting his shoulders like a soldier. Never! No wink of sleep while in every muscle, in every hair, in every heartbeat pulsed the certainty that something unusual threatened his own.

With a honk and a rattle, with gratings and the squeak of wheels over snow, Tony drove the great truck up to the door. The children flung on their coats and

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with loud yells ran out into the cold. Each one in turn left the door open, so that Mary Kublic called after him. Five different times she ran and shut the door. Spurts of sharp fresh air mingled with stale warmth in the room.

Jeddy pressed his heavy body closer and looked up quivering at Jozefa. Anxiety had reached its pinnacle. He must guard, he must watch, he mustn't let her out of his sight.

Michalina pushed Jeddy aside with her little foot. She and Mary Kublic now lifted Jozefa by the elbows. She was like a great mattress rolled and clumsy. Tony came in laughing and red in the cheeks, frost-drops on his sheepskin collar where it was turned up near his mouth. He was slapping his hands together in bright yellow mittens. "Woof!" he said. "Some cold. Got to get you moved quick or you'll be froze."

Every one about Jozefa seemed pleased, seemed dancing on tiptoes, seemed expectant; about Jozefa, whose heart was more reluctant than her heavy body. Even Jeddy was wagging his tail. He was passing out of a period of intense anxiety and suspicion, and beginning to hope that there might yet be some good in these human plans.

Jozefa hobbled out of the warm, steamy cabin. The keen air struck her a blow in the face. The bright glitter of the frost flew at her like an angry cat. It scratched and tore at her weak eyes. Cold pained her nose. It stiffened her breath. She gasped. She feared to step on the icy road. Wind buffeted her long skirts and whipped

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them about her crutches. The auto-truck towered above her, a mountain height, an impossible scramble. Tony brought out the rocking-chair and put it in the back of the truck. With a box for her to climb on they succeeded in swinging Jozefa in. She sat in the chair while Tony blocked the rockers. Peter and Leon and Jeddy sat on the floor. Michalina climbed into the driver's seat beside Tony. They were off! The Kublics waved and shouted after them through the open door, their breath like smoke blown on the air.

Starting with a jerk but soon jogging on with the engine's firm even burr, slowly at first so's not to jar, they rounded down the hill, slipped smoothly onto the Milesbrough road, then turned the corner toward the little promontory of land where Wobblenski's house used to be. During that entire short, slow, sober journey Jozefa's eyes were pressed close shut. It was only five minutes from door to door.

Jozefa's heart seemed gone out of her. How to live? How to provide? Michalina would have to go back to the laundry. She would pout and fret. Even with her pay there would not be enough. By spring would she, Jozefa, be able to work again in onions? Would her crippled leg permit? Would there ever again be onion fields in which to work? The fields had been washed bare by the flood. There were only stones and gravel frozen upon them. The storehouses had been washed away. Where was the wood to come from for fires? Where the food for their mouths? Jozefa's head was bowed. She groaned within her. If only at this moment

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she might fall asleep in sweet death, never open her blinded eyes again to the sharp hurt of the sun, never rouse her tired spirit to the old, old fight for food and fire!

The truck rasped and stopped. After a jerk backward Jozefa's chair was still. They were here. They were at the new house. They had come, Jozefa repeated to herself, not to the house of Wobblenski that she feared and remembered . . . that was washed away . . . but to whatever rude shelter of boards and tin the Red Cross had provided upon their land.

Jozefa's eyes remained shut, but with shouts of joy Peter and Leon plunged out of the truck. Even Jeddy, sensing at last that everything was as it should be, barked lustily and jumped about them with the kick of the frosty air in his legs.

Jozefa sat massive in the rocking-chair in the rear of the truck, her oval face furrowed and gray, her flat nose red. At last, unwillingly, she opened her watering eyes.

A vision!

Through a blur she saw a vision. No, not the small one-story house of Wobblenski; not the hut with black tar-paper held to its sides by yellow slats that she'd pictured. Neither the dreaded house of Wobblenski nor the mean paper hut made up her vision. Instead, oh, sight to tease and torture the soul! Holy Virgin! why that memory, why that vision, and at this time? It stood out so startingly, so glaringly vivid in the clear sun-

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shine, the house, her house, the proud house! Two stories it arose, and a mansard roof; of clapboards painted orange with green trimmings; her house, her proud house, the house the Pestwickis stole from her.

Ah, saints in Heaven! Jozefa felt she'd gone mad. The glare of the sunlight, she thought, had so filled up her eyes that she couldn't see. Nothing came through to her mind. This was but a vision already in the brain. She'd gone blind. She couldn't see what shelter was really there before her; only this vision burned on the brain, this shining majestic vision that tantalized with keenest torture, that filled and bewildered her mind.

Tony brought a chair for Jozefa to step on; he and Michalina helped her out of the truck. Michalina stood smiling, her cheeks the pink of the morning sky, her eyes sparkling with frosty blue. All of a sudden Jozefa realized that she was looking at Michalina; that she saw her; that she, Jozefa, was not blind. She reached out and touched the little red hat over Michalina's ears. Her fur collar was turned up to meet it, so that her face was framed and fair.

"Say, ma, some house!" Michalina was laughing almost hysterically. Jozefa winked back the moisture that was in her eyes, that made that dancing deceiving vision. She must see. She must see clearly. She must never let Tony and Michalina know of that false vision of grandeur that obsessed her mind.

With eyes blinked to clear sight, Jozefa again looked about her. Over there was the river as it used to be in

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winter; milk-white snow at the edges, piled against the willows; black ice in the center. The sky was pure blue. A light wind stirred the air to life. Sparrows hopped about, chirping and sprightly. The birches were gone, the Slambowskis' house across the road was gone, the barn was gone. Wobblenski's Point seemed swept bare, so open, so unfamiliar, so close to the sky. A little way north, along those wheel-ruts of frozen mud that now served as the street, Jozefa saw the nearest of those black tar-paper cabins provided for her neighbors.

She turned back bravely to face her own shelter, crossing herself as she prepared to hobble up to the door. Again that vision, that gorgeous, overpowering vision which stirred her spirit to amazement and despair. Why had it arisen out of her memory? Why did it continue to flash at her out of the intense glow of light on the snow? Her house, her proud house, her house of orange and green.

Tony grasped her by one arm, Michalina by the other. Adjusting her crutches Jozefa moved slowly forward. She blinked. She winked desperately. She longed to clear the tormenting picture from her brain. She longed only to forget her old happiness and prosperity, to be quickly swallowed up in the reality of her woe. Two stories with windows, the mansard roof . . . ah, the old perfidy of the Pestwickis that still stabbed at her heart!

"Say, you're wise now . . . what you think of the house, ma!" Michalina smiled in her face. Jozefa felt

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dizzy. She reached out to touch with her fingers, to prove at least that the laughing beauty of Michalina was true.

Jozefa never succeeded in shaking that vision of the proud house from her eyes. She wiped her eyes free from tears, yet it remained. She stood there before the house, looking up at its orange sides. Jeddy jumped about her. Peter made cartwheels and Leon attempted to imitate. There was a whirl of confusion, excitement, shouts, and barkings; legs, heads, tail, fur, and ears blending in whirling enthusiasm.

"Some house, ma! Say, some house! Say, get busy; come on inside!"

They pushed and pulled Jozefa along. They all crowded up on the porch. It smelled of new paint. Jozefa feared to meet the Pestwickis. For she realized now that it was indeed the Pestwickis' own house, and no vision. She had heard that old Peter Pestwicki and two of his sons were drowned, swept off by the flood. How, then, had their house been saved? By what miracle did it stand here? Jozefa felt the icy fingers of the supernatural pass across her scalp. She shuddered even in broad daylight. Houses do not move themselves about. And yet the Pestwickis' house had come down to stand on Wobblenski's land. Miracle of God! And now they went near. Tony opened the door. There would be those Pestwickis, those hated ones inside!

Jozefa tottered as far as the doorstep. The vision had so struck into her eyes that she realized now that it was

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no vision, but that solid before her, and standing firmly on Wobblenski's Point, was the house of the Pestwickis, the house they had stolen.

She feared to go forward. She trembled violently from shock. She would turn and flee. The terror of that sight! Thought of the Pestwickis' coming out and finding her here!

She turned toward Tony. "Hela?" she gasped. "The Pestwickis?" Holy Virgin! if he would only tell her they had all been drowned; that the holy angels had come in the night with all the saints and moved her house from the land of the Pestwickis and caused it to rise up on this land that was theirs!

"Aw, don't you give a damn for the Pestwickis!" said Tony. "They can't touch you none!"

"One peach of a house!" chimed Michalina. "Come on inside. We got her fixed up spiffy!"

Slowly the little procession moved indoors, into the kitchen from which four months ago Jozefa had been cast out with her children, widowed, poor, stolid, tearless, forsaken. Now she returned, sobbing, tottering, like a child, her feelings too great a flood for her to withstand. She sank down on a chair. A stove, a warm fire, a table, dishes, pans, the smell of things cooking, a clock that ticked! The door was open into the next room. There was a glittering new American bedstead and bureau. And here under her feet, God the Holiest Father! linoleum . . . linoleum on the floor!

Michalina bent over her mother. "We got the upstairs rooms full up with roomers," she said. "Ain't

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but about half enough places for folks to live in. They pay good money. And ain't it one peach of a house, ma?"

A letter written by Jozefa Zalinska to her brother, Stanislaw Sadwinski.

"Dear Brother: I hasten to inform you we have got for ourselves a new house. We have gone out from Mary Kublic's. This new house we have, this house we now live in, it is a tall house. Two stories it arises and a mansard roof. The Red Cross built its foundations. They have clothed it with new paint, orange with green trimmings. It is our own house. It is our proud house. It is the house the Pestwickis stole from us.

"The Pestwickis refused to leave their house in the flood. Tony Kublic warned them. They were the first to be warned. He risked his life to warn them. They refused to leave. They feared their house would be stolen. They remained in their house the first day of the flood. Such a tall house, they said, the water would be unable to reach them. At night the wires were washed down. They were in darkness. They were forced to light two oil-lamps. They were surrounded by water. The flood rose. It washed them away. The Pestwickis were forced to save themselves in the night. They threw themselves out of the windows. They clung to boards. All but Peter Pestwicki and two of his sons were saved. Old Peter and two of his boys were drowned.

"The flood carried their house down the river. It

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carried it onto our land. It clung to the roof of our house. When the flood sank away, the house of Wobblenski was gone. But our proud house settled down on our land. Here it now remains. What stands on our land the Lord gives us. The Red Cross refuses to move it. It cannot well be moved.

"The Pestwicka cursed to her own hurt. Her curse returns upon her own head. She suffers unhappiness. The Red Cross put up a hut on her land. One story it arises and a corrugated iron roof. But it is enough.

"She is greatly offended. She is left without reason. She says we have stolen her house. She strangles with rage, she blackens us with her tongue. She says we are leeches.

"The Pestwicka grows quarrelsome. She is in harmony with no one. It is known how the curse of the flood came from her lips. Tony Kublic heard her curse on the day of the flood when he went to warn them. He heard her curse the wedding day of Wobblenski.

"It is further known how after the flood the Pestwicka took too much of the kindness of the Red Cross. Again and again she walked to Milesbrough to ask for her share of clothing for the refugees. She hid clothing in her house. She wore so much on her body that she could scarce get in through a door. She's got a fur coat for her back, but she's paid for it with the honesty of her name. She got clothing enough for her whole life. She got clothing enough for her whole family. She got clothing enough to be buried in afterward. Finally they

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caught her. They carried her into court. They have put her in that prison she deserves.

"Dear brother: I sit in my proud house. I watch from my window high up. The Pestwicka will be forced to pass this house on that day she comes from jail. How will she bear the sight?

"Dear brother: This thought is my pleasure. I shall see her pass.

"Your sister, Jozefa Zalinska."

Chapter Three

JOZEFA never forgot the coming of that cow.

It happened five days after she left Mary Kublic's. Five days in which to get used to the finding of the proud house on their land; five days in which to accustom the eyes to the glow of black-and-red linoleum on the floor. It was on the very day after Jamie and Richard rode up to the door in Tony's truck. Their days at "Industrial" were ended. The guy-that-was-boss-to-that-burg had written the boys could come home on probation. With the heat of affection in her heart and a bit of cold anxiety in the back of her brain, Jozefa had opened her arms and pressed the boys to her breast. How long-limbed and large they were, so that Peter and Leon were made to look shrunken and wan. Jamie and Richard were glad to be home. They looked about the new house, grinning, sheepish and shy. The bit of icy misgiving in the back of Jozefa's mind melted away. With Tony near to help her, Tony whom the boys adored, the good Lord would perhaps make Jamie and Richard less wild, less given to running away, more home-keeping and sober.

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Jozefa had known the boys were coming, but the cow was a surprise, and no bit of anxiety in regard to its care chilled in her brain. A cow is comfort, wealth. A cow, and with calf already growing inside her! Mr. Arthur Watts brought her over from Milesbrough in his fordtruck. Ah, even a cow rides in a land so rich! He brought her because the Red Cross had allotted her, together with some hens and a pig, to Mrs. Zalinska toward the support of her family. How all the old retold miracles of her childhood became now to Jozefa musty and stale! This America, it was indeed a new land of new miracles, of new wonder. How the pranks of Old World fairies and good-folk paled before this Red Cross!

The whole family, Jozefa, Michalina, and the four boys, even Tony Kublic and the five roomers, went out to see the cow. She stood in the slush of melting snow under the deep glistening blue of the sky. The morning sunlight shone on her coat, glossy as varnish. She was red and white, with polished horns. She stood before the door of the shed, silhouetted against the yellow of its new boards. She shown as polished red rock and as fresh-fallen snow. Mr. Watts had wiped her off and rubbed her down. No dung caked her hocks, no mud sullied her flanks. Her tail-tassel was combed, her coat brushed. She stood solid, cud-chewing, placid. Her eyes were like wet glass, her horns uplifted, her nose of moist rubber. The red and white patches of her hide glistened like new paint over the bulging promise of her sides. A fair and perfect offering, a golden gift. Jozefa threw her

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arms about the thick throat, she cried and laughed over the warm scented shoulders. She almost picked up the cow and hugged it in her arms. Her cow, the very image of the one washed away; her cow, sustenance for her family, and already with calf. Jozefa caught up the hand of Mr. Arthur Watts and kissed it with the same fervor with which she had kissed the cow.

Mr. Watts had been standing near, watching the greeting lavished on the beast. He was tall and thin, with loose dried skin. A lanky black coat fell below his knees. His long cheeks were deeply creased, no smile on his solemn face.

Mr. Watts had never had his hand kissed before. But if his neck were not attacked and belabored with affection like that showered on Tina, he guessed he could put up with hand-kissing. But no neck-hugging, thank you, from any dago. *He* wasn't responsible for giving her the cow. He'd raised Tina, but it was Kilpatrick, running the Red Cross over to Milesbrough, had bought and paid for her. He, Watts, was only delivering the goods. He shouldn't oughter get kissed.

He had delivered twenty hens in a crate, mused and cackling; also a pig, where, as Jozefa said, there was none before. For hadn't hers been stolen out of their own yard, long ago, before the funeral of old Michael? Holy Virgin! how riches rained down now faster than misfortunes in the flood!

Twenty times that day Jozefa hobbled out from the kitchen, across the squashy slush, to the shed of new boards. Each time Tina was there, stolid, plump, and

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true. Not like a dream come true . . . no, for surely Jozefa had never dared to dream so much. Who in this world would ever presume to dream of such fortune? Of gold showering instead of rain, of ground that brought forth cabbages without plowing, of trees that bore bread instead of leaves, of bacon that trotted to you on little feet . . . of all these things one might perhaps dream, if in a busy world full of hungry mouths one had time to dream . . . but never of a saint called "Red Cross" who sent in an auto, in the plain light of morning, a calm, good, new, freshening cow, a free gift, a perfect healthy cow that smelled of warm udders; that smelled, oh, that smelled as only a cow can smell!

That evening Jozefa wrote a letter to her brother Stanislaw, at home in Lovna. She wrote eagerly, in Polish. She told of her cow, and of the coming marriage of Michalina.

"Tony Kublic will marry Michalina Zalinska.

"Father O'Keefe will perform the ceremony at nine o'clock in the morning. Anastasia Gutfinska and John Ripkar will stand with them. There will be no festival, therefore the wedding costs nothing, only the priest.

"Tony asks no dowry with Michalina. In America they ask no dowry. He is glad to get her.

"Dear brother: They have found the store of Wobblenski. It was covered with clay. The gasoline-pump was washed out of the ground. Only the land and the store remained. They are the possession of Peter and Leon. They belong by inheritance. Mr. Kilpatrick is

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made guardian. We went to the court in Milesbrough. He now stands in the place of a father.

"They have cleaned out the store and restocked. They have put back the pump. Tony and Michalina run it.

"The Red Cross has given me a new cow, 20 hens where there were 17, a pig where there was none. Peter and Leon have delight in new shoes.

"I have even my money back that is for prayers for my soul when I am gone. It is secure in the bank. It was not washed away.

"Dear brother: Except my curse haunts me all else is now restored. By the grace of God I am well. I walk about lamely. I do such work as I can. I shall send you soon in a letter one good American dollar.

"Your sister, Jozefa Zalinska."

Chapter Four

IT WAS the cow that stirred up resentment in Wobblenski.

Whereas before he had only sighed on the south wind, now, on this first night after the coming of Tina, he began to shriek from the north and hurl the loose ice about. As she lay in her bed Jozefa felt the proud house rock as if shaken by foul hands. Fear pumped in her heart so that she couldn't sleep. She fell to worrying about her new cow, pinnacle of prosperity and good fortune. Did the lost spirit of Wobblenski feel aggrieved at her cow?

Jozefa knew why her neighbors had turned themselves against her. Not once had Mary Kublic come to visit her, to see with her own eyes the wonder of this new house. Stella Jawuska had failed to greet Jozefa when they met in the road that afternoon. Jo Kostrebi had passed her in silence. To be sure, the Red Cross had sent to Jozefa a better cow than to Stella. Kostrebi, who formerly owned a great house had been given a two-room shack wherein to shelter a family twice as numer-

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ous as Jozefa's. But to Jozefa this treatment from her neighbors spoke not of jealousy, but of deep abhorrence of her crime. If she was shunned by the living, was it a wonder that the dead, wronged and forsaken, howled in the night and flung out his hate on the wind?

Icy fears, that had come down with her from Mary Kublic's, began to whirl through Jozefa's brain. She was obsessed by the idea that she had wronged Wobblenski. For him to forsake his children in order to save himself from the flood, that was but natural. It is God Himself who puts it into the heart of a man to guard his own life. Furthermore, it was by no crime of his own, by no desire to stop his own breath, that Stanley Wobblenski had come to his end. He was no suicide. Evil from the mouth of Jozefa had urged him to death. Her curse had unsettled his brain.

In like way it was through no fault of his that Wobblenski's soul was condemned to wander. No prayers had been said. No saint asked to intercede. No money paid for Masses that the soul of Wobblenski find peace.

Jozefa could not speak of these things to Michalina; child of this alien land, she wouldn't heed. Father O'Keefe was unable to understand Jozefa's confession in Polish. More than ever she longed for the homeland, for the sympathy of her brother Stanislaw, for the comprehension of Father Polc in this matter.

As the January days passed there was more wind at night, more ice hurled against the windows in rude gusts. Finally three days before the wedding day of Michalina the weather changed. It turned warm and

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sultry, too warm for January, so that Jozefa felt let down, all zest gone out of her legs. The ice remained unbroken in the river, but without its hard bright glitter; its surface honeycombed so that from shore it looked moist and dull. The two mutilated lilac bushes in the yard, that had survived the flood, began rashly to swell out their buds. The freeze that was bound to follow would correct them roughly for thus misreading their calendars. During each day the earth swallowed down melted snow in great gulps. Each night the ground stiffened again and grew hard.

In the mornings Jamie and Richard and Peter splashed off, without hat or coat, to the school, held now in a portable set up near the store. Leon sat indoors with Jozefa or went out, followed by Jeddy, to squat and sail boats in a puddle. Leon was a gray-eyed, big-headed child, fretful from hunger, whose great eating did him no good.

Michalina and Tony paid little attention these days to the weather. They were young, vigorous, elastic, busy, happy in love. Any old weather would do for them, warm or cold, raw or fair. Weather didn't mean much in their young lives. The only temperature worth caring about was the heat of their own hearts.

But day after day, Jozefa, now able to limp about without crutches, felt in her big body the debilitating warmth of that January thaw.

All that warm Monday night, the night before the vows, Jozefa lay awake, sick with apprehension. If the cow stirred Wobblenski to resentment, how about the

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wedding of Tony Kublic and Michalina? Jozefa turned to ice in the heat of her bed as she considered the probable disapproval of Wobblenski's ghost to this marriage. What to him was the cow? And he had hurled himself in resentment at the cow!

On that day in January, the wedding day, the air was as warm as in August; sultry, uncomfortable, a heat never before known in winter.

After the ceremony in Milesbrough, John Ripkar brought Jozefa, Anastasia Gutfinska, and Mary Kublic home in his car. Before noon he set Jozefa down at her own door. Jeddy, followed by Leon, came out to greet her. The boy's shoes sucked through the mud; he crooked an arm shyly before his face.

The sun made one perspire. It was pleasant and balmy in the yard, except underfoot where the ground reeked with moisture. The door of the shed was open and Tina's sleek sides could be seen within. All was peace and warm sunshine, with a feel of spring in the air.

The snow had melted away except what was piled, half ice, in north corners or stacked under the low limbs of hemlocks. The heat during the day had sunk so much snow into the ground and then pulled back so much moisture that by evening a thick mist hid the land. You couldn't see the shed from the house. You couldn't see the river.

At the end of the day Jozefa felt loneliness and homesickness closing about her heart, like that still mist closing about the house. She shut the outer door and

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sat down at the kitchen table under the glare of the electric light.

Michalina and Tony, this day wed, had gone from Milesbrough for a two days' trip to Chicopee-Mass. Pete Cronin had lent them an auto to go in. They would see little Katherine. At thought of getting a message from her girl Jozefa's heart was glad. Little Katherine, who lived apart from weddings, calamities, and floods; from harassing cares and guilt too awful to be given words. To her mother she seemed like a child shriven and dead, already safe with the saints.

It was six o'clock. The house was dark and very still. Of Jozefa's five roomers four had gone to Milesbrough. The fifth, John Ripkar, was sitting in the evenings with Anastasia Gutfinska. He might not be in before midnight.

Leon went to bed without eating his supper. He refused to eat. Some of the unseasonable heat burned in his body. Peter didn't come from school until it was quite dark and past seven o'clock. He came home alone. He said Jamie and Richard had run away at noon from the school and hadn't come back. He, Peter, had feared to come home to his grandmother without the others, so he'd hung round the store all the afternoon. After supper time he'd felt hungry and had finally started home alone, although he was frightened by the dark and by the way the houses popped at him out of the mist.

Jozefa was filled with anxiety. Where were Jamie and Richard? What mischief directed their feet? She

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lighted a lantern. It was nearly eight o'clock. She would go to Mary Kublic's up the hill and see if the boys were there. When Jozefa opened the door she was confronted by a wall of white mist; thick and solid. She and Peter and Leon were cut off from all the world of the living by that barrier. Jozefa put out her foot on the step to feel her way. The light of the lantern was defeated by the fog. Suddenly she heard a sound, a queer, grating, moaning sound that seemed to pull itself out of the surrounding thickness and suck itself through her ears. It startled Jozefa. For a moment she paused. Then she turned and hurried back into the house. She shut the door quickly. Now another moan was followed by another. Soon groan after groan shattered the air, vibrated through the mist, permeated the house.

Jozefa cowered by the table under the light. She was alone. Peter had gone to sleep with Leon in the next room. Jeddy lay under the bed. Jozefa felt safe in the brightly lighted house. For a few moments all was still. Then rose again that haunting moan. It rose and swelled. It seemed as if the very voice of pain had mingled with the voice of fear to rend the air. The sound came from outside the house, not far, from the river, perhaps. Fear clutched Jozefa's heart. Water came in her eyes. Pain pressed in her nose. Her throat stiffened and was dry. She sat on the edge of a chair, clutching the sides of the table-top with both hands, in an iron grip. Her heart leaped and flapped about wildly within her chest.

It came again. It began with a long-drawn-out moan,

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with the saddest sigh. It rose slowly to a full-throated groan of torture. It was the spirit of Wobblenski calling to her, to her who had caused his doom. It was the soul of the murdered pursuing the murderer.

Now on the heels of these groans rose a distant trembling; a rumble of thunder shook the house. A few moments of tense quiet, then again came that long earth-shaking, that deep subterranean roar. A flash of lightning, and with a sudden cackle and hiss the electric light in the kitchen was sucked out. The house was left in total darkness. A blast of wind began rattling windows and doors. This was soon followed by another roar of thunder. The electric light flashed on. It flickered and flashed off again as if an imp's fingers were playing with its vitals. Now the rain came down and swashed and dashed against the panes. A crash of thunder shook the house to its core. A flash, a fearful vivid flash, followed instantly by a deafening crash that rolled out in a long roar ending in the whistling of the rain. Now the storm broke loose all at once with thunder, lightning, and a deluge of rain. The world was full of its lashing fury. The darkness was stirred to a vast turmoil.

Jozefa cowered by the kitchen table. She had never seen a thunderstorm in January before.⁷ To her it was something supernatural, called down by devils on an evil world. Were they all to be blotted out, snatched from life by the boisterous rush of these uncanny powers?

In the darkness and isolation, with that wild storm

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raging about her, Jozefa doubted not in her terror that Wobblenski, in order to work some retributive justice, had linked his own to other fiendish powers. So great by now were her fears that they'd passed from mere fear for her mortal body. Wobblenski would get her soul!

Her heart hurled itself about in her breast like a caged animal, mad from fright. Jozefa sat rigid, her hands gripping the table in the dark. Such utter fear and horror! She would have stampeded to the limit of her strength if she'd had power to move.

Flash after flash of that supernatural light still flamed through the windows, but the body of the storm had begun to reel away toward the south. Gradually the rain grew less and less violent. Now above the subsiding fury Jozefa heard again that rising moan, that ghostly voice over the water.

Slowly the wind died away. As the minutes passed the flashes grew fainter. Jozefa sat clutching the table in the dark. The house was still, only the sound of distant rumbling. A smell of freshness seeped in through the walls. A new chill spread through Jozefa's great shivering body. Cold rattled her teeth. She strained her eyes to see in the dark. She strained to hear. The retreating storm had passed far to the south. Jozefa heard only the quick dripping from the eaves. Then again rose that rhythmic periodic moan, that groan, that voice, that cry that wracked and tortured her ears.

The storm had receded. It boomed and flashed ever weaker and weaker. Would those moans across the water never be stilled?

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In a convulsion of terror Jozefa wrenched her hands loose from the edge of the table. She flung up her stiffened arms over her head in the dark. She slammed them down together with half her great body across the top of the table. She lay there quivering and trembling. She choked in her throat. She was wracked by the fierce pumping of her heart.

Then Jozefa vowed. She vowed a vow that she would save the soul of Wobblenski. She would snatch him from his doom. If his sufferings were indeed as terrible as those she was now forced to endure, she'd pledge herself to save him. She would free him from her curse. Whatever she could do should be done quickly, tomorrow. This Jozefa vowed before God Almighty in her heart. She vowed before God, before the Holy Virgin and the saints. Stretched there across the kitchen table in the dark, her face pressed to the boards, Jozefa's lips muttered. Above the fearful thumping of her heart she vowed a sacred vow.

No sooner had she whispered this vow in her heart, no sooner framed it with her lips, than the electric light over her head came on of itself. It shone out again in its clear glare. The horror of darkness no longer oppressed.

Jozefa drew herself up with a quivering spasm of relief. She heard steps outside. The tension of isolation snapped. John Ripkar came into the kitchen, his coat collar up. He was wet from the storm. "Say, I'm scared your cow's sick," he said. "It was mooing and kicking, out there, some, as I come by."

Ah, the fiends, her cow! The possession of all others

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dearest to Jozefa's heart. Why hadn't she pronounced the vow sooner? Why had she not hastened to propitiate the powers of evil, to fend off this deepest misfortune? Ah, her cow!

"Hadn't I better go down to the store and phone the vet?" asked John.

Ah, if he only would! If he would only hurry!

Jozefa, wrapped in an old bed-quilt and with a lantern in her hand, hobbled from the dripping house to the shed. For an hour she stood in distress over the cow till the veterinary came.

Some blight had touched Tina. She had ceased to low or kick. But by the light of the lantern you could see how she had wallowed. The red hair on her side was curled and moist and soiled. Her eyes rolled until only the whites could be seen. Her tongue lolled out. Strings of froth hung from her mouth. There had been a struggle with some fiend. She lay on her side, fallen, twitching, dumb. It was weeks yet before her time to calve. Yet she lay there, her sides heaving as if she were going to die.

After an hour the veterinary came in his auto. Jozefa ran back over the stiffening ruts to the house. The night was now dark and still. With the passing of the thunderstorm the weather had changed. The temperature had dropped many degrees. The air, cleared of fog, had become so cold that one shivered. There had occurred in one short hour that quick leap from summer heat to keen winter frost that tones up the nerves like wine, but draws strength from the bones. The night was now clear, frosty, and still. Stars gleamed icily down. It was

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impossible to believe that the earth had lately been bathed in warm rain and shaken under the thunder and lightning of summer.

Jozefa built up the fire in the kitchen range. The house was deadly chill. Jozefa remembered Leon, sick and feverish. She went in to the child and felt of his forehead. Alas! evil had fallen! Leon was burning hot like a stove.

When John Ripkar came in, Jozefa called him into the bedroom, dimly lighted from the kitchen lamp. John felt of Leon's burning head.

"If we had the toad's liver dried," sighed Jozefa in Polish. "Or that old gilt plaque of God's Mother!" All her tokens and healing unguents had been lost in the flood.

"If he ain't any better tomorrow you can call a doctor," said John.

All the rest of that night Jozefa sat alone by the table in the kitchen, under the glaring light. John Ripkar went upstairs to bed. He didn't guess Jozefa's thoughts, how she was depressed and fearful, how she was crushed and wrung. Her vow had come too late. The angered spirit of Wobblenski, in league with what fiends? had wrought havoc before her vow was made. Tina would die. Her calf would be lost. Leon would die. Where were Jamie and Richard? Never before had they stayed away overnight.

Jozefa's vow had not come in time. Her vow had come too late. Michalina and Tony? Ah, who could tell? Who can measure the penetrations of evil? What mischief had reached them in Chicopee-Mass?

Part VII: Lovna

Chapter One

IT WAS a cold winter in Lovna, in the old country. So cold this day in January that the sun had no heart to come out. The wind howled in the early morning and hurled snow against windows and doors. The cold was intense. Wind made it go home to the bones. No new snow was falling, but the old was tossed and blown about in frozen ice-particles that cut any inch of skin exposed to its whip.

The sky was a cold senseless gray. Feeling was frozen out of heaven. No one need look for mercy from there.

Every one stayed indoors unless compelled to go out. Those few hurried down the village street, keeping their backs well to the wind, only turning their faces when forced to, and then only for one blustering second.

Cold reigned in the barn of Stanisław Sadwinski. Wind shook the old timbers and disturbed dust that had lain there for years. If you looked up, bits of straw and dried manure fell in your eyes. A drift of fine white snow had sifted through a crack. The gloom under the big arch of the roof was like evening. The

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day was fading without ever blossoming into brightness and warmth.

It was near noon before Stanislaw had energy to get out of bed. Julka, who slept beside him, had as yet made no stir. Indeed, she was too far gone in lethargy to care whether she received food or not. When she wasn't coughing bitterly, until the blood came, she was making her peace with God. So long she'd sent up her prayers! God had wearied of her voice and had no desire to move her nearer. Poor Julka was as dead as any person can be and still be said to be in life.

Stanislaw himself was now gripped by the death-cough. On rising in the morning he would cough until his head swam. With him the disease progressed more rapidly than with Julka, who seemed to have dried into a mummy in which no physical change any longer occurred. Her eyes alone were alive. They moved uncannily in the face of a corpse.

Even on warm days Jan and Stefan slept until noon. Today they'd certainly not face the cold before nature forced them. They were rolled in blankets and straw in the loft and snoring loudly.

Old Stanislaw gave over to coughing, then put himself to making up the fire that was out. Cold pushed through his body faster than he could coax the sluggish warmth. But the draught was good and, with the aid of a brisk wind pulling from outside, he soon had the fire well going. The neighbors had sent in food. Lovna was safely out from the clutches of war and famine. Many could afford to send in to their less fortunate neighbors

bread and bacon, with now and then a piece of rib-pork for the holiday season. Lovna had prospered during the past year, by the mercy of Our Lady. The harvest had been abundant. The pigs and geese had thriven, with no hidden disease to take them off. There are always those in every village who create misfortune out of their very shiftlessness. But for the most part the people of Lovna had in their storerooms plenty wherewith to keep the old beast from the door.

To Stanislaw Sadwinski these tokens of good will from his neighbors were poison on his tongue. He, the son of the chief man of Lovna of old; he, the son of Jozef Sadwinski, the learned, the rich, the envied, the just—he to feed his poor bones on bread sent in by the pitying hand of a Koszinski, an innkeeper, a brawler whose father had brought Jozef Sadwinski to the lawsuit! To eat the bread of a Koszinski was bitter to the tongue of a Sadwinski of any generation. Could Stanislaw bring himself to call it savory, that bacon crisping on the fire? It might have been cut from the side of that pig himself, that Stan Koszinski; a pig and the son of a pig! The food of charity has a peculiar tang, it tastes not of itself, but of him who gives it, perhaps with a sneer on his lip, perhaps with his tongue in his cheek.

The wind howled and battered as if it would knock down the rickety barn and fell its rafters to the earthen floor. Stanislaw sat huddled before the fire, his head wrapped in a red woolen skirt that had been sent in to his wife, his bent shoulders covered with his worn cloak

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which he wore day and night. He had been born the son of an important man. Pride had swelled in him when, as a child, he saw the villagers bowing to the greatness and learning of Jozef Sadwinski. This had entered like poison into the mind of the boy. He had grown up with an exalted idea of his family's greatness. He had never dreamed that a Sadwinski could fall into unconsidered desuetude, the discarded of Fate.

At the inn they said the Sadwinski family'd run out. Blood that is thick blue in one generation usually thins to water in the next. It wasn't alone from the ill-usages of war that the Sadwinskis were suffering. The strain had died out that made the family respected. The sons, Jan and Stefan, were lazy good-for-naughts. The father was a dreamer, an emotional weakling, harmless enough, to be sure, especially now that he was racing his wife to the grave.

Stanislaw was not unconscious of these estimates. He sucked in his bread soaked in bacon fat, and sipped hot tea. It brought him new strength, so that antagonism burned anew in his mind. He felt hot refutation for these beliefs of his neighbors. Anger rose in him that they could so charge to character those defeats for which war and the consuming disaster of war was alone responsible. If only he, Stanislaw, had had half a chance, how he would have proved himself a man! But, whenever he'd got on his feet, Fate had slammed him down again. No man not of courage and persistence would even be alive today after what he'd pluckily lived through. The war had crushed him. It had sucked the

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last bit of energy out of his sons. How then say that the blood of a great family had run down? Had Koszinski said that the blood of his family was degenerating when his son Peter lay butchered on a Russian field? Did he say the blood of his fathers was thinning to water when his son Leo came home with a bullet in his knee, so that he could never walk again without swinging out his leg in a grotesque gesture? No, all alike had suffered from war and from famine, every household in Lovna, none excepted. Did men say their families were degenerating because every child in the village had been taken off, during the war, by famine and disease? Stanislaw shook with indignation now that the bacon had given him strength.

He thought of his twin sister, Jozefa Zalinska, across the sea. That sister who had in a way deserted him. He had not seen Jozefa for many years. She was widowed now and misfortune had lashed her even in that rich land.

Four letters had come from America during the last three months. The first one had come in November. It was not written by Jozefa nor yet in a language that Stanislaw could understand. It had been a great puzzle, that letter. It was in a strange language and written by a strange hand. Some thought it was from the President in America. They could not know. Jan Sulewski had come back from America. Likely he would be able to read it. But Jan Sulewski was away. He had gone to Zilnik. They'd expected him to return that night, but he hadn't returned. He hadn't come back for many

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days. Stanislaw had been forced to put that strange letter aside. Finally Sulewski returned. All the people gathered at the inn, curious to hear him read that strange letter. But Sulewski was unable to read it. He was able to read English, he said, therefore this letter could not be in English, for there were in it many words he could not understand. So no one had ever been able to know the news that strange letter contained.

In January had come at last a second letter, from Jozefa herself. A sad letter; it told of the disaster, how by flood America was swept away! Wobblenski was gone, the house of Wobblenski, the store.

Wobblenski . . . that rich man . . . yet death snatched him as if he were poor! And Jozefa. Stanislaw could only pray for her soul. He could only pray God would forgive her. It is, as she said, a grievous sin to curse the soul of another. Wobblenski was dead. Jozefa had cursed his soul. Then might the Lord God provide her with His mercy! For only through the mercy of God can such crime be shriven.

Jozefa had written. Her cow was gone, the house of Wobblenski, the store. Ah, that letter, it moaned of disaster!

Then a third letter had come. "We have got for ourselves a new house," Jozefa had sung in this letter ". . . a tall house. Two stories it arises and a mansard roof. The Red Cross built it foundations. They have clothed it with new paint. . . ."

And now, only a few days back, a fourth letter, the wedding letter of Michalina. Michalina, a virgin yet

widowed; Jozefa had been able to make a marriage for her even in a land stripped by flood. Tony Kublic would marry Michalina Zalinska. Today, this day in January, was the wedding day. Jozefa had written to invite them.

And the Red Cross had given them a cow. Ah, that fourth letter, how it read like a dream! Thinking of it now, hope stirred in Sadwinski. He would rouse himself at once, he would write to Jozefa. He would force his hand, stiff from cold, more stiff from age. He would cry to Jozefa, "Inform me at once who is this Red Cross, this great saint of America? Which is his name-day? Where can one bow before him and kiss his shrine?"

Also there was that hint, that possibility of a gift mentioned in this last letter. One big American dollar! Ah, Jozefa, borrow it now! Send that one dollar while there is still life in our bones! By Easter we may all be gone!

Stanislaw got to his feet. He must go down to the inn, whatever the weather. He must write to Jozefa. That suggestion, that half promise, it ought to be looked into at once, at least by a man of such initiative as Stanislaw Sadwinski, crushed under unjust misfortune though he had always been.

But Sadwinski no sooner put his head out-of-doors than he retreated into the barn and closed the door again. Cold is bad enough when sauced with sunshine. This having it blown icily down your neck was not to be borne.

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It was no day to go to the inn. The letter to Jozefa must wait till tomorrow. After all, one day is as good as another for the writing of a letter.

Stanislaw Sadwinski went back and sat down by the fire. He leaned his head against the cold wall of black boards. In that corner, even now at noon, was the dusk of night. Sadwinski shut his eyes. Chewing away on a rind of bacon, he set his old head to dreaming out, as was his life-long custom, those things which he was able to accomplish only in dreams.

Chapter Two

IN THE dim light of the barn the red skirt with which the head of Stanislaw Sadwinski was wrapped took on the dull brownish color of dried blood. His face and lips were the pale buff of bleached skin, pinched and shrunken. He closed his faded eyes and swam off at once into one of those daydreams that all his life had been the only vigorous offshoot from his emotional mind.

The fire in the queer improvised stove of broken tiles and bricks dropped lower and lower; the embers fell to gray ashes. The huddled body of Sadwinski looked like a dead turkey, the red skirt his fallen comb. But inside his mind burned the slow embers of a desire which his imagination still had power to make glow with life . . . the blood of the Sadwinskis . . . he would show them . . . he would show . . .

Jan and Stefan came down from the loft and went out to the inn, there to buy vodka on credit and run up that score of chalk marks on the wall that after their father was gone would give over the land of the

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Sadwinskis to the greedy hands of Koszinski. Old Stanislaw was hardly conscious of his sons' going. He was lost in a daydream. He dreamed. And in his dream he saw himself digging. He was digging in the side yard, near the ruins of his father's house, wrapped in snow. He felt in his dream neither the cold bluster of the wind nor the ice-particles whirled against his face. He was digging with an old broken shovel, digging into a heap of rubbish frozen hard. Yet in his dream it was not difficult to pierce the frozen earth nor to lift the hardened clods. It was that old pit where years ago his father's servants used to bury potatoes below the frost, for winter use. It had not been uncovered for years. Chance of finding anything of value in it there was none. But Stanislaw would always feel an impulse to dig whenever he passed this mound. He fancied there might be something hidden there of value. During the days of famine he had sometimes thought it might be worth while to look beneath the settled sods and see if some long-buried potatoes had not survived the years. He knew this was a foolish hope. But it had been inertia rather than sensible conviction that kept him from digging. Gradually, as his brain became more and more pinched by famine, he had pictured not vegetables, but richer treasure, in the old potato-pit.

Now in this cold January twilight at noonday, with the wind whistling through the cracks of the barn and the white snow sifting in, old weary Stanislaw dreamed. He dreamed a beautiful dream. All hail to those who can weave gloriously of emotions and set reality aside!

Stanislaw took this easy, this only sure road to happiness. He shut his eyes, he closed the doors of his mind, he found in the quiet exercise of the imagination what most are foolish enough to seek in deeds.

There was no exertion or trouble connected with raising the frozen sods. The shovel sprang up in his hands as if on springs. The newly scooped hole below the frost line smelled damp and earthy. And there, just as he had expected, was an iron chest that had been his father's. Stanislaw grasped it with his bare hands. It rose without weight. It was untainted by the mold in which it had lain so long. The iron was without rust. Its lock gave to his hand. He raised the cover. The hinges moved, greased and silent. There to his eyes was disclosed the heaped-up gold that his father had buried and forgotten. Gold brighter than any child ever saw in fairyland. Stanislaw ran his hand among the round golden coins. There was no shock of cold. The coins were as warm as if warmed by the sun, they gleamed with life. Happiness bloomed in Sadwinski's heart! Such happiness as can bloom only in a place that has been flooded by malice and defeat. Warm gleaming gold! Stanislaw took up the iron box, snuggled it under his cloak, and hurried into the barn. Jan must not know. Stefan must not know. Julka must not dream what he had found.

For what did Stanislaw want gold? Not to touch and fondle for its own sake. He was no miser. Not for food and fire and decent shelter for his body. Not for comforts for old Julka, whose only comfort now was

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thought of that heaven on the doorstep of which she hovered. Stanislaw Sadwinski pictured himself taking the chest of gold to Father Polc. "It is for the building of the new church," he heard himself saying as he pressed the chest into the hands of the priest. "It will finish the roof. It will add a steeple of height and grandeur. It will furnish the altar with such things as are costly and fine. It will buy a side-altar for Our Lady of Czenstochowa and overlay it with pure gold."

People would come from far around, from all the villages, even from Zilnik, to see the church of Lovna; more beautiful than any other church. And the priest would say (even after Father Polc and his successor had passed away), the priest would say to the visitors as they gazed in wonder on the glory of that church, "A rich old family of the peasant nobility, by name Sadwinski, the leading family of this village, gave the money. There are Masses said here continually for the repose of their souls."

Stanislaw pictured himself at Mass next Easter Sunday. He could hear Father Polc calling his name from the chancel. He could hear the gratitude in his voice. He could feel a warm swirl of joy pulsing through his inner body at knowledge that his neighbors, who had always rated him a visionary, were now hearing of his practical benefactions. He had given funds to finish the church and deck it beyond what any one dreamed. At last the family Sadwinski had returned to that place of leadership and respect in which Stanislaw had been reared.

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With what steps of dignity and importance he would pace home after the Mass! The sweetness of the incense, the murmur and boom of the organ, the shrill singing of the people, the glitter of candles, the glad ring in every voice and from out every heart that winter was done and resurrection accomplished: all these could stir no quivers of ecstasy in Stanislaw's being equal to those caused by the awed whispers of neighbors, the interested glances of the men and women of Lovna. They would linger in the sun of noon near the church. They would point him out either boldly with the finger or in more reticent admiration with the tongue. He, a Sadwinski, who had given so much money you couldn't name it to the church!

Ah, sweetness in the heart! Approbation of others, pride in family; the only kind of pride poor Stanislaw ever had a bit of right to, and that right so long dead! Sweet, sweet, those imagined whispers, those glances, those pointings! "Stanislaw Sadwinski, in the name of his old and honorable family, he has given as no man ever gave before to this parish!"

Stanislaw awoke with a shiver from his daydreaming. The fire in the stove had dropped to ashes. The barn was icy cold, and now at midday the wind howled with the mournfulness of night. Julka stirred. She reached out a claw for the rosary that had slipped from its grasp.

Stanislaw got up. The grotesque red wrapping around his head made it look as if it had been battered until swollen to three times its normal size. He made up the

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fire. He warmed some carrot tea, sent in by the Sattrowskis, and gave Julka to drink. In Stanislaw's heart burned a remnant glow from another world. He was warm with an unearthly happiness, and in his mouth when he raised the cup of charity there was no bitter taste.

But later in the day this inner glow cooled. Alas, that that immortal fire should dim!

Stanislaw began pacing restlessly up and down in the barn. For an hour he fidgeted about in the semi-darkness. He was unhappy. He was miserable. Julka muttered her endless prayers.

Stanislaw hesitated no longer. Cold or no cold, it was necessary to go down to the inn. He roped the rags of his cloak about him. He went out. Through the stinging cold and the darkness he hurried down to the lighted inn. It was necessary to see if Leopold were there; if he were making alive with his flute those sounds which alone can resurrect dead dreams.

Part VIII: Peace

Chapter One

IT WAS the day after the wedding day of Tony Kublic and Michalina Zalinska. It was cold in Vermont, with a sharp wind that blew through the thickest cloth as though it were cobweb. White clouds were tossed about the sky, covering the sun while snowflakes fell. Then again the sun would struggle out, as if from under piled bed-quilts, and the snow-squalls would scamper away. Everything movable was thrown helter-skelter. Bare twigs of trees, dust from the frozen road, dead leaves, papers, straws, all whirled about gustily in cold and unrest.

Tina was safe, though sick and weak. She'd staggered onto her feet. Jozefa had wrapped her round with a flowered bed-quilt, and strapped it about her plump sides.

Leon was better. He sat up in bed and complained that potatoes didn't taste good. His head was much less hot. The vow had been given in time to save Leon.

By seven o'clock in the morning Jamie and Richard shuffled into the house, turning shamed shoulders to-

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ward their mother, and awaiting stoically their punishment. Stirred by unusual events and aggrieved that they were not taken to the wedding of Tony and Michalina, the boys had run away from school, the day before. They'd bribed Peter to silence with two cents' worth of candy and beaten it to Milesbrough, hitch-hiking their way. Their plan was to go to Boston, hunt up Wallace, the guy who had given 'em one hop-off and promised 'em another. The boys had paused in Milesbrough and fooled away the afternoon. In the evening they'd spent money, gotten in devious ways, to treat themselves to the movies. It was so late and stormy when they came out of the movie house that, instead of pushing on towards Boston, they started for home. During the thunderstorm they hid in a barn not far outside Milesbrough. They burrowed down in the hay when the weather turned cold, and passed a comfortable and unrepentant night. As breakfast looked to them worth a licking, they now returned to their mother before school, prepared, after the whipping was over, to refresh her ears with the plot of last night's movie.

Instead of whipping them or even sending them to school, Jozefa left the two boys at home, with Peter, to guard Tina and Leon. Jozefa was pushed from home today by matters too important to be put off.

Up the long, frozen, rutty road toward Milesbrough she toiled on foot, her lame leg dragging painfully, the wind beating her rudely and twisting her skirt. Jeddy walked demurely by her side. For the last mile she was

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given a ride, perched up in front of a giant oiltank of burnished yellow. Jeddy's lungs nearly burst through his great chest as he tore along the road behind, trying to keep up. The driver was muffled in black fur up to his nose and down to his eyes. "Christ! it's cold!" he said.

Jozefa wrapped her thin jacket about her, and tucked her bare hands up the sleeves. Her face was set, her mind so occupied with her mission that she scarcely thought of the shivering of her body.

In Milesbrough, with the fierce wind hurling dust into her face from off the bare road, Jozefa went about fulfilling her vow. Jeddy appeared in town just in time to escort her from the bank across the windy square to the post-office. At both places Jozefa found a clerk accustomed to helping Polacks. After the business was done, Jeddy was again left behind, and forced to find his way home alone. Jozefa got a ride all the way in Stan Stanko's closed car. Such warmth and comfort! Her vow was fulfilled. This shelter was sent. Now all would be well.

Soon after she got home, Jeddy trotted into the yard. He seemed to feel no resentment that he had been left behind to come back the three miles alone. To have met his mistress in Milesbrough, to have been there to proudly attend her on that four-minute journey between bank and post-office, that was honor, that was reward enough to his mind for a six-mile run on a cold day.

Jozefa resolved to say nothing to anyone about her

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vow. Who was there who could understand? Tony would laugh at her good-naturedly. Michalina would lift up her little nose in a sneer. Only little Katherine would perhaps understand; little Katherine, with her sharp black eyes, who took in many things the others failed to comprehend.

Jozefa found Tina content in her shed. Leon was up, out of bed, running all over the house after the other boys. It was well that the child was sewed tight in his clothes for the winter. Jozefa took her headshawl off and started the fire roaring in the good stove.

Later that afternoon Mary Kublic came in. "Praised be Jesus Christ!" she exclaimed. This was her first visit to the new house of her friend. Together the two sat down in the kitchen on straight chairs, their backs to the table, their toes to the warm bulging front of the stove.

Jozefa said nothing to Mary of her trip that morning to Milesbrough, or of her errand there. She never even mentioned her strange vow made in the terror of the night. Dreadful as had been her experience in the midst of that supernatural thunderstorm, shut off, alone, without lights, her cow perhaps dying, Leon drying up of a fever, Jamie and Richard snatched from sight and knowledge, yet in the warmth and light and security and matter-of-factness of a sunny winter afternoon, with the wind stilling toward sunset, and the western glow coming in the window and spreading itself over the black and red of the floor, one does not speak easily

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of night-happenings, although their sharp imprint still lasts in the brain.

Jozefa made tea. Together the old friends sipped in comfort, in companionship. Mary Kublic was glad to get her feet warm. She was glad of the cheering tea. Her face looked worn and tired. She spoke in Polish and with a soft, gentle voice, without chiding. "You have now a good cow, Jozefa, one that will give milk for long years. You have a pig and hens, together with the best house in the village. You and your grandchildren stayed on in my house for eight weeks. You paid nothing. I have nothing to show from the flood. Because my house was on high ground and was not washed away the Red Cross sent me nothing—no cow, no hens and a pig. No reward is mine for all I spent. If misfortune had come, if the flood had destroyed my house, I should be better off today than I am. Many came into my house sick, and I cared for them; many came hungry, and I fed them. I killed my hens. I sold my pig to buy food. I had no cow to sell. Now I am left poorer than those that lost everything. And yet the Red Cross sent me nothing, because, he says, it was not reported to him what I lost."

Jozefa knew what Mary Kublic meant by these words. Mary Kublic was indeed a good woman. What she said she said not in anger. What she said was true. She had given freely of all she had. She had little left to feed the mouths of four children. Whenever she'd worked hardest she had only run into trouble, and been rebuked by the law; for when she made and sold liquor

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with her own hands, she'd been clapped into prison in Milesbrough as if she'd dishonestly stolen, or sold herself evilly to men.

Mary Kublic had told her present complaint in a soft, even whine. Now she bent her small head over her cup of tea. Her little wrinkled face was peaceful. She had only done what was right for herself and her children. She'd stated her case to Jozefa Zalinska, who'd lived for two months and eaten besides in her house. Jozefa's dull mind had felt thankfulness, but she hadn't thought to express it by so much as a loaf of bread.

Jozefa felt the justice of her old friend's demands. She realized there was no resentment in Mary Kublic's heart, only a quiet, persistent, detached sense of justice that viewed her own and her children's rights as she would have viewed those of others.

Jozefa hesitated. It was true she owed something to Mary Kublic, something more tangible than gratitude. She felt no sensitiveness that this fact was presented to her attention by her creditor.

It was true she owed Mary Kublic something in return for all those lean terrible weeks after the flood. Now that her time of prosperity had come, it was only fitting that she should repay. But with what? Her hens? Ah, how could she part from her glittering hens? Her pig? Ah, to have again a new pig in the poke was gold in the heart! Milk from her cow? Ah, poor thing, when it would be possible to milk Tina was doubtful.

"I will send you a hen, Mary Kublic," faltered Jozefa. "And when, next winter, we kill the pig, half of

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the best parts shall be yours. When we have milk, Jamie shall take you each day a good share. And I shall rejoice to see it go because it goes to you."

"But I have no money, Jozefa, and my girls' feet are bare, so that I am forced to wrap rags round their stockings inside their shoes. The Red Cross has fitted Peter and Leon out with new shoes, but mine must go about with snow coming in through the holes."

"Go to the Red Cross, Mary Kublic; plead with him that he fit out your children with shoes. He is very generous."

"I have been to the Red Cross, Jozefa. I pleaded with him in English. He says I have suffered no loss from the flood and so he can't give me the shoes. He says if I suffer because I gave in charity to my neighbors, that is the business of my neighbors. It is the duty of my neighbors, now, he says, to care for those who cared for them. He will give me nothing. He found out that I was in jail. He thinks I want the shoes only to sell. He turned me away. He says they give only to those who suffered and lost in the flood. He will give me nothing."

"Tony will soon be back, Mary Kublic. It is planned that they live in this house. Tony will give you part of what he earns at the store. You're going to be prosperous. Tony is a good son."

"How can I wait to buy with money he earns at the store? My need presses, Jozefa Zalinska. My girls can go to the school no longer because they lack shoes. They threaten to drag me into the court because my children

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have forsaken the school. Yet how am I able to provide them with shoes?"

A deeper feeling now sounded in Mary Kublic's voice as she continued. "You have money in the bank, Jozefa Zalinska; it is known you are rich. And yet you refuse to pay dowry with Michalina. She brings her husband nothing. She comes empty-handed. She comes like a beggar."

"Tony asks no dowry with Michalina, Mary Kublic. He is glad to get her. In this America they ask no dowry."

"So I starve and my children go naked and I sit in prison because you owe me, Josefa Zalinska, and will not repay." Mary Kublic's voice choked in her throat. Her rage was beginning to swell.

Jozefa saw with dismay that a break with her best friend, her only close friend, was coming. She knew now that frank confession was the only thing that could save the bond between the heart of Mary Kublic and her own.

"I have no fortune in the bank, Mary Kublic. I swear to God, I call on the saints to witness, that what I say is true. I have given my one hundred and sixty dollars to the church to pay for Masses for the soul of Stanley Wobblenski. He was no suicide. I killed him; with my mouth I killed him, and his soul cries to me for justice in the night."

Mary Kublic looked at her friend as though she had lost her wits. "One hundred and sixty dollars for a Mass! Holy saints! Jozefa, your mind has gone astray!

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One hundred and sixty dollars is a fortune. It would pay for Masses from now to eternity."

"I have paid it, Mary Kublic. If I had money, I would give it you. When I have that with which I can pay you, I will repay. I will send you a hen ready for the pot on tomorrow. When the cow is in milk, half shall be yours every day. The best of the pig is for you when we kill, and when I have money I will give you that, too, without grudging; for now I see it is right. But today I stand as poor as you are. I have no money in the bank, no money for myself or to give away."

Mary Kublic put down her empty cup on the kitchen table. There was the sickish smell of cooling tea and sugar in the room. The slant afternoon sunlight streamed across the red-and-black-checkered floor. Outside, the river lay covered with bluish ice. Within, the sun and stove combined to make the air sleepy with comfort and warmth.

Mary Kublic felt no longer anger in her heart, only disappointment that she had found no relief for her immediate want. But she was so used to care and anxiety and disappointment. The flood had come, the flood had gone; like all of life, it had fallen heavily upon her. It had prospered her neighbors; it had stolen from her. Well, Tony was a good son, though a foolish one not to have driven a sharp bargain with Jozefa Zalinska before he married Michalina. One hundred and sixty dollars was too much for one Mass. The dead are never so needy as the living. Ah, well, in time all would go well! Stanley Wobblenski had grown rich out of the

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store and the gasoline-pump, and when Michalina and Tony had money from the new store, she had no shadow of doubt in her mind they would share it with her. She had hoped to get new shoes for the girls out of the Red Cross. But she had been turned away. She had hoped to get them out of Jozefa. She had failed. After all, one did the best one could, and then got on somehow.

Mary Kublic was quite silent through the rest of the visit. She was like a gentle disappointed child who is so used to disappointment that she really feels most at home in its shadow, and who would probably burst out crying if for once she got what she wanted.

Jozefa talked quietly of the sure success of the store. The Red Cross had restocked it and awaited repayment from Tony on easy terms. Tony and Michalina had rented the store and the pump from the estate of Wobblenski. Jozefa was given custody of the two little heirs, Peter and Leon. The future looked bright. The road through Harry's Mill was to be rebuilt as a state road, from Milesbrough to the north. In summer autos would pass in great numbers. The pump would never be still. All the prosperity that was coming would be shared in by good Mary Kublic and her other four children. With a prospect like that, could two old friends quarrel? Could they be resentful or estranged?

Chapter Two

MARY KUBLIC wound the black headshawl about her small wrinkled face. Her bright eyes looked keenly at Jozefa. She feared that her old friend had suffered in her head from her late miseries.

"Send then the fowl on tomorrow, Jozefa," she said, "and praised be Christ forever and amen! Let me hear about the cow." She turned and went out of the door.

The late afternoon light spread a raspberry pink over the eastern hills. Mary Kublic's short black figure tripped away toward home. "One hundred and sixty dollars for a Mass," she was thinking. "For one soul! It has touched the head, all these misfortunes of Jozefa's." She, Mary Kublic, was left impoverished, without money, cow, hens, or pig; but besides the feeling of duty done she had in her heart a gentle salve, the feeling that at least she had come through better than her friend. At least she was sane in her head, while her poor old friend Jozefa seemed a little touched.

Poor Jozefa, the Lord had indeed put her through much. She had lost in Poland two children; she had left

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a father and brother behind. In this new land she had buried a man, a good man, Adam Zalinski, who had provided well for his family and died leaving Jozefa a cow and money in the bank. He had bought for Jozefa a proud house and then after his death (in a way that wrung the heart) Jozefa had lost first her pig and then her house, all through the evilness of the Pest-wickis and the silly childishness of that old rogue, Michael Zalinski. Afterward she had the good shelter of a rich son-in-law; then again fortune had whipped Jozefa. The flood had taken away everything except Michalina, who was more given to dressing herself up than to helping her mother, and Jamie and Richard who were wild boys, and Peter and Leon who were little more than two mouths to fill up with food, and Leon weak in the belly.

Yes, Jozefa had suffered like the rest of them. That son-in-law, Wobblenski, of whom she had boasted, had gone off and left her and his two sons to drown alone in the flood, in the night and the cold and the dark. Was it then likely that Jozefa had turned over a fortune to Father O'Keefe to have Masses said for his soul? One hundred and sixty dollars! Enough Masses for an army! But Mary Kublic intended to be on watch. She would see if Father O'Keefe really said any Mass to pray out Wobblenski. Her skeptical mind believed beforehand that he would not. Well, she felt no bitterness against Jozefa. She, Mary Kublic, would have done the same. She too would have lied; she would have lied to her best friend to protect the little money she had in

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the bank. She too would have hoarded it to pay for Masses for her soul when she was gone.

Jozefa watched out of the window and saw Mary Kublic go. She headed up the Milesbrough road toward the bushes that were now painted a glowing pink. Mary went by the path that turned from the road up the hill, and vanished from sight.

One hundred and sixty dollars for the Mass. It had not seemed grotesque to Jozefa until she told Mary Kublic and saw the incredulity in her little dried face. Mary Kublic had not believed. She had thought Jozefa was lying to protect her savings.

Jozefa was troubled that she'd had to refuse Mary Kublic. The goodness and generosity of the little woman when her neighbors were in distress made her, in Jozefa's eyes, a saint.

Jozefa set about preparing the supper. Tonight, perhaps soon, Michalina and Tony would be back. They'd come in smiling with young love and happiness, full of the great adventure of marriage and a day in Chicopee-Mass. They'd have word for Jozefa from little Katherine. The girl's elfin face came into the mother's mind; like that little one, the first to die, long ago in the homeland. With Michalina and Tony would come happiness and security; steady toil and plenty. Then indeed should Mary Kublic share their plenty with them.

Jozefa sat down again by the stove. The potatoes were cooking, steaming away, letting out a pasty odor.

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Across the valley the sun was lowering its bright rays nearer and nearer the western hills. The children had not yet come in for supper, nor John Ripkar from work. It was a time for peaceful folding of the hands.

Jozefa felt a great content in her heart. Never again would Wobblenski moan and sigh over the river. Never again would he ride the wind with evil spirits because her curse harried his soul and drove him to desperate suffering. One hundred and sixty dollars. Ah, for half that amount one could be prayed out of hell itself!

That morning Jozefa had gone to Milesbrough. She had told no one. Jeddy alone was wise and silent enough to be permitted to attend her. She had gone first to the bank. Then she had gone to the post; she had mailed a letter to her brother, to Stanislaw Sadwinski in the village of Lovna, Poland.

Jozefa said over to herself now the words of that letter, and the words brought her peace:

“Harry’s Mill, Vermont, January, 1928

“Dear Brother: We have everything; you nothing.

“Is peace of the soul then nothing?

“It is true the Red Cross has given me a new cow. It is true we have this good house, twenty hens and a pig. (The Red Cross! Ah, brother, it is the goodness of God.)

“Yet I suffer in soul. I suffer from a hurt not even the goodness of the Red Cross can remove.

“They that tell it about say that Stanley Wobblenski

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was pushed into eternity by his own hand. But I inform you how it was my words that killed him. I struck him dead with my tongue as surely as if I had struck him with my hand.

"My guilt is the guilt of Karniki. He was old. Everything went bad with him. They carted him off in the same cart with the body of his wife. There were sores on his head.

"The body of Wobblenski is not found. The waters refuse to release him. The earth refuses to cover him. The funeral cost nothing.

"Yet I suffer much misery. I remember Stanley Wobblenski. I think on my guilt toward him. I cursed him; with a ghastly curse I cursed him. The sin of my mouth slays his soul.

"Ah, brother, to have sharpened the tongue, to have wounded the soul of another! There is no greater grief in the heart.

"They will send you a notice. Take the notice to the post-office. They will pay you the worth of \$160. If you are sick, wait till you are well. Do not send Jan or Stefan.

"Take my \$160. to Father Polc. It is for the building of the new church in Lovna.

"Ask Father Polc to send me a blessing from the home church. Ask him to send absolution.

"Ask him to pray for the soul of Stanley Wobblenski. God's will be done!

"Thus will a miracle occur. A miracle of God. Thus will the soul of Stanley Wobblenski be freed from the

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curse of three corpses. They will slip off into eternity and free his neck. Thus will my guilt fall from me. So shall I live easily until my death.

“God’s Mother grant it!

“Your sister, Jozefa Zalinska.”

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